

# 公爵令嬢の たしな 嗜み



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# Common Sense of a Duke's Daughter

(公爵令嬢の嗜み)

Chapter

001-123

Reia

(澪亜)

Story Description:

I was reincarnated as a daughter of a Duke. However, when I regained my memory, I had already reached the “ending.”

My engagement had been discarded and if things goes according to its “course,” it was set that I will be imprisoned by the church.

Where is my bright future?

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

# Chapter 1: Although it's a bad ending

...It hurts.

The first thing she felt was the pain. Up until that moment of time, she was still in her slumber, and it was the pain and drowsiness that awaken “this one.”

...Even if it was just a little, she wanted to wake up earlier.

She was thrown into the ground in front of many people, and there were a number of men who were holding her down. Even if she wasn't a girl, anyone would start to struggle.

If this is a kidnapping, maybe a Prince riding a white horse will come and save her... but what kind of sweet dream was she dreaming about. This place is the “place of her condemnation.” Other than the victim, there is no way a perpetrator like herself would have any salvation.

By the way, since this situation was one she, herself, created, let this one explain how this came to be.

My name is Iris. Iris Lana Armelia. The first child of a Duke, Duke Armelia of Tasmeria Kingdom. A blooming young lady who's currently 16 years of age. Father is the Prime Minister, and Mother, being a daughter of a General, also has parents with superior lineage. I am a bona fide young lady [ojou-sama], and in this Kingdom, my lineage only comes second to the Royal Family.

As for why I have been speaking in third person... it's because “I” am a different human being. To be precise, right now, Iris' personality and “mine” have fused together.

Speaking of Iris... She is the other half of my person, an ordinary woman who used to work in a country called “Japan” before dying at the age of 30. That day, I was working really late at night, died in an accident right after work, and awoke from the pain just a while ago.

However, just a few moments ago, I had been living as her with no recollection of my previous life, until her personality and my own had

fused together... That's how it is. ...However, because of the present state of thing, I probably cannot afford to take it easy.

Well, now that she and “myself” had fused as one, I looked back at the memories I had of my past life and recalled something. ...Is this world not the same game I was playing back then!? That's what I thought.

When one lives only for her work, she has no spare time to fall in love! Although that's what I thought, I still had a maiden's mind and wanted to experience the thrill. Because I was like that, I was superbly addicted to otome games in my previous life.

At breaks and at night; during those times, I would always play those games to heal myself. Not good, not good. It's not about that... Right now, this world looks exactly the same as the game I was playing in my previous life.

The title of the game was “You are my Princess [Kimi wa boku no Princess],” KimiPri for short. The story took place in a world similar to Europe during the Middle Ages, with the female protagonist being the daughter of a noble at the bottom of the ladder of aristocracy, a Baron, in a school where the children of the aristocracy – including the upper echelon – gathers, and a Cinderella story unfolds... or so to say, it was something common.

The capture targets were: the Second Prince, the son of the Knight's General, the Prime Minister's son, and the son of the Pope of the Darryl religion. Their character template is exactly the same as the story and is as follows: overly self-confident, hot-blooded, cool, and mysterious.

Now then, in these kinds of stories, of course, a rival character also exist. And she is the fiancée of the Second Prince, Edward Tom Tasmeria, also the daughter of a Duke, in other words, me.

If the player character, the daughter of a Baron, chooses Edward as her target, his fiancée, in the pursuit of interfering with their relationship, is spiteful towards her.

Although she is a daughter of an aristocrat, she is still, after all, a young girl... Speaking of something she did to be spiteful, well, it was slander and

harassment at school. When I was the player character, the rival character was her, and there were a few times where I did find her quite obnoxious... During the ending of the route, she was imprisoned by the Church of Darryl before returning home to be placed under house confinement. "There's no need to go that far..." That kind of sympathetic feeling occurred in me.

I mean, if one gives it some consideration, the player approached the capture target who already has a fiancée and had an illicit love affair with him... Normally, wouldn't you think that the heroine is the bad guy in this situation? No matter who it is, they would hate such a person, and they would think what Iris did is pretty cute.

...With that said, in these kind situations, no one would listen to such explanations. There is not a single ally, it is a completely helpless condition.

I have already reached the end of the game, dragged and surrounded in a certain place by the good-looking guys and the protagonist to be convicted.

...Or rather, when reincarnation usually happens, wasn't it the norm for a person to recall their past life during infancy? Like this, no matter how hard I try from now on, I'm already checkmated on the board.



“If you have any excuse, let’s hear it now, Iris. Regarding all the times you’ve harassed Yuri.”

The sound of Ed’s pained voice resounded in the area. He was looking down with eyes full of scorn.

“...Can you let go of me?”

I spoke to the guy who was holding me down, but he ignored my words. The son of the Knight Leader, Dorsen Katabelia, is really strong, and the

place on my shoulder where he was touching hurts.

Dorsen ignored my words and strengthened the hold on my shoulder instead.

“It hurts, so let me go. ...You, the son of the one who serves as the Knight Leader, Druna-sama, who is supposed to wield his power for the sake of the weak; to think you would do something like using brute force to hold down a weak girl.”

When I said that, he showed some reaction by twitching. As I thought, no matter where it is, the schooling of the Knights are the same.

“...You, a weak girl? Please stop joking and think about what you’re saying carefully.”

And the person who was laughing through his nose while he said that was my brother, Berne Tashi Armelia. Ah, the way he’s looking at me, it doesn’t seem like he thinks of me as his Sister, and the way he’s smiling sarcastically really annoys me.

That said... although it’s frustrating, because I’ve already been checkmated on this board, there’s no other choice but to intentionally make a bad move.

“...It is true that I did harass the daughter of the Baron, Yuri Noir. I admit it.”

“...You sure did admit it quite readily, didn’t you?”

“That’s right. Because it is obvious that everyone in this place already knows what had happened, I thought of spare you of your time. Consider it as my good faith.”

“...You, why did you harass her...!”

“...Why are you asking ‘why’...”

Ed was enraged in an instant. I wonder if I can remember it... No, the memory I have regarding the protagonist had deteriorated because of all the love and romance filling Iris’ brain. Surely, all the memories she has about her has been altered and interpreted out of her own convenience.

## Translator's Message

“Common Sense of a Duke’s Daughter” is also one of those novels with female protagonists being reincarnated in a world of Otome games. However, unlike the others, our reincarnated person regained her memory just as she has reached the bad end. She didn’t have the chance to strike down “death flags.”

This novel is somewhat slow-paced and the chapters are somewhat short in the beginning. The story doesn’t pick up its pace until around Chapter 8. With that said, please try to refrain from passing judgement on the story until that point. Thank you.



## Chapter 2: Love cools down

...I can't associate myself with such farce any longer. After all, this is the part where Ed and his merry companions would try and vent their frustrations. The part where they justify her as the victim. If I don't avoid that scenario, I won't be able to escape being under house arrest... There's already nothing left for me to do in this place.

The more important thing is whether or not I can avoid being imprisoned by the church... However, that has to be negotiated with Father. Once again, I repeat, there's nothing left for me to do in this place.

"...Since I will not be able to meet everyone from now onwards, I will take this opportunity to say my farewells. Everyone, thank very much for everything so far. To be able to attend this academy with all the other students, and to those who had treated me well, you have my sincere gratitude. Farewell, everyone."

Since I probably will not have a chance to go out into polite society in the future. I probably won't need to come back to this academy.

"Iris, wait...!"

After finishing with a pleasant feeling, I wanted to leave this place but Ed detained me. He can't read the atmosphere, can he... I wonder, how did "I" come to like this kind of man.

"Before you leave, apologize to Yuri."

Seriously~ I really wonder why did I've come to like this kind of guy for a period of time? Ah, on the other hand... I think I've misheard it, but I seemed to have heard something strange.

I, a daughter of a Duke, apologize to a daughter of a Baron in front of everyone? I really wanted to voice this question loudly.

...I'm not saying this just because resentfulness or pride. However, daughters are nevertheless daughters. How I conduct myself will highly reflect upon our Ducal House, which has great influence among the aristocracy.

In other words, when I apologize, it will be comparable to Armelia House bowing to the Baron House. It is unprecedented for someone from a Ducal House to bow to someone from a Baron House.

Not only does it affect our house, it will also affect the Houses of Marquises and Earls. When a new aristocrat grows impudent, it is possible that a situation where the power balance of the aristocrats will collapse... Haahhh, his brain has seriously become filled with nothing but love.

In the first place, is that something you should say to your former fiancée? Place your hand over your chest and think about it clearly! ... Consider the situation well, in this place, it's not just me, but there are also many curious spectators... Although it seemed like there are students here who had no connection whatsoever, there were some who had somewhat soft eyes when they were looking at me. Or rather, I felt their sympathy being directed towards me.

...I might be able to get away from this place now.

“...I will not apologize. As for the things I did, I did them with dignity and self-respect. Even if it leads to the complete destruction of this body in the future, I will not yield.”

I was resolute when I did those things, was what I wanted to implicate.

“...Yuri-sama. I wonder if you're still going to continue to deprive me any further. My fiancée, my position...”

Here, I let my tears flow down. The feeling of a tragic heroine. Oh, with the turn of events, pleasant feelings were directed towards me. Although I was treated as the villain a little while ago, right now I am the victim.

“That said, I am who I am, and there are some things I won't let go of. Pride is one of them. If I apologize, it will be identical to agreeing to trample over myself. Therefore, I will not apologize. I will not allow you take anything away from my any further.”

I've declared it all... Ah, I feel refreshed. While feeling refreshed and cheerful, I left the place. The expression on Ed's face remained somewhat dissatisfied. On the other hand, the heroine had a blank look on her face

and a question mark above her head, as though there was nothing but a bed of flowers inside her brain.

After I stepped away from that place, I have reached the outskirts of the academy ground. ...Although it might be a little odd, I trusted my good younger brother to make the preparations. As I expected, my younger brother had already contacted the house to have someone pick me up.

I boarded the luxurious carriage alone. ...As for my luggage, the house will probably arrange for it to be brought back or disposed of.

With this, I guess it's farewell to the academy. Besides, I have no more reason to come here. According to the story, apart from being confined and deprived of my social status, there were also other results. Because Father wants me away from the academy.

Fuu... I blew out a sigh. The farce has ended... The story only reached up to this point. After this, there is no longer an outline. Above all, the next part is to have a face-to-face meeting with the "Last Boss," my father. To be frank, I've been feeling quite tense since while back.

While the carriage continued its way towards the Armelia residence in the Royal City, the atmosphere inside the carriage became heavier and heavier.

# Chapter 3: The Villainess Daughter at Home

The residence of the Duke of Armelia... In our house here in the Royal City is where father, who cannot leave the Royal City due to his job title of being the Prime Minister, and mother, who likes sticking with him, lives. And because of that, the house was unexpectedly luxurious. Judging from the knowledge of my previous life, the house is more than large enough to be considered as a mansion.

Upon entering the house, the first thing I did was head to my room. And then I sat down on a chair to calm my heart. After all, I'll be having a face-to-face meeting with the "Last Boss." I want to relieve some tension.

"...Young mistress...!"

"...Oh, Tanya. I'm home."

Entering the room filled with tears was my maidservant, Tanya. Despite being a commoner, she has perfect manners, and at the same time, she also has beautiful features.

"How can you stay so composed...! As for me, I'm so vexed and frustrated..."

When I see her looking ragged while shedding tears, it really warms my heart. But at the same time, I feel really apologetic for causing her inexcusable worries.

The commoner, Tanya... is a girl whom I picked up from somewhere generally known as "the slum" when I went to town incognito. It was a time when I felt the heavy weight of having title "the child of a Duke." It wasn't just at home but even amongst the aristocratic circle. The other parties found it difficult to speak to me with ease because of my lineage. When I went to town, I found her lying on the side of the road. While thinking, "Maybe if it's this child, she can become my conversational partner..." and calculatedly picked her up. She, however, since that time, felt really thankful and decided to serve me very, very well.

If you ask me, it isn't an exaggeration to say that Tanya is family.

"Please calm down, Tanya. It is still not the right time to wallow in sorrow and cry."

"...It is as you say. Please pardon me. As for Master, it seems like he will be returning in the evening."

Tanya has a good head on her shoulders. In addition, she can also cope with any situation immediately. Even now, I wonder what happened to all her tears, she has already regained her composure.

"...Is that so. Well then, could you please bring me a drink to relax with?"

"As you wish."

"...Tanya."

"What is it?"

"...Thank you."

"It might be presumptuous of me, young mistress. However, I do not serve the Ducal House of Armelia, but rather, I serve the young mistress, is what I think. Therefore, even if it's someone part of the royal family, I will never forgive Edward-sama who betrayed young mistress. As for young mistress' meeting with the Master, I will be behind young mistress all the way as your ally."

"How fortunate I am."

"No, it is I who is. Also, I'm not the only person in this house who feels the same way, young mistress, so please do not forget it."

That right. In fact, in addition to Tanya, I have picked up others. I was considerably strange while I was growing up. Back then, instead of getting presents, I asked to pick up children who, like Tanya, have no relatives and wanted those kids to stay by my side... This was something I begged my parents to do.

The scary thing was, it was cheaper to feed commoner children than receiving a gift. My parents reluctantly agreed, and every year, a child without relatives who was the same age as I would be picked up. This was



not introduced in the game's setting. If I was affected by the memories of my previous life sooner, I might not have remembered this at all.

When I was talking to them, I was able to forget for a moment that I was a daughter of a Duke, and it was a precious time for me. However, as years slowly went by, the pressure from the surroundings expressed that it wasn't appropriate not to clearly establish our standings. Although the relationship between us are similar my relationship with Tanya – Master and Servant – they are nevertheless very special to me.

“...However, Tanya. Please put your own happiness first before anything else.”

When she heard my words, Tanya had a dubious expression on her face. No, in actuality, she's pretty much expressionless... However, having spent a really long time with her, I can pretty much guess what she's feeling.

“Because of my willfulness, I ended up dragging you guys into a destitute world. At any time, if any of you desire it, you may be free from all this and I will not oppose. Or rather, when I think about what lies in the future, this would be for the best...”

“Young mistress, please do not say any further than you already have.”

Unexpectedly, Tanya interrupted my words.

“I would have died at that time. And it was young mistress who saved me from that situation. From then on, my life belonged to you. The only time I will leave your side is when either this life of mine has come to an end... or when you decide that you no longer need me.”

“Goodness. If that's the case, then I suppose you will never be able to leave my side unless you die, Tanya”

“I wonder if there is any greater happiness than this.”

“...I completely understand how you feel now. As I thought, I really am a very fortunate person. However, Tanya. There is more than one way to be happy. That's why you shouldn't forget what I've said earlier.”

“...If that is what the young mistress wants.”

Although reluctantly, Tanya nodded her head. ...As I thought, if it ends up being the “church imprisonment and status deprivation” route, I do not want Tanya to go with me. Just to this extent, because it’s necessary.

However, in this condition, it seems like she’ll follow anyway... Haahhh~ As I thought, I should somehow try to get an upper hand on father.

With a new determination, I drank the tea Tanya served. ...Yup, it’s delicious.

“...Young mistress.”

When the atmosphere in the room calmed down, a different servant knocked on the door.

“Please, come in.”

“...Please excuse me.”

The person who came in was the head maid, Rimé. Wearing stylish maid clothing without a single opening, giving an impression that she is the real thing.

“...Young mistress. The Master has called for you.”

“Oh, it’s time already? If I’m not mistaken, father doesn’t return usually return unless it’s nighttime...”

“Because of the matter regarding young mistress, he seemed to have returned as soon as possible.”

“...Really...”

Fuu, I spat out a sigh. Ah, where did the vow I made earlier go... Somehow, it seems like my stomach is doing flip-flops.

“...Although it’s impudent of me, young mistress. Regarding the current situation, I think that young mistress is faultless.”

Because the usually strict Rimé unexpectedly made a supportive declaration, my eyes involuntarily widened with surprise.

“Everyone in this mansion is an ally of the young mistress. Therefore, please meet with Master with a dignified appearance.”

...In the story, Iris had been portrayed as a villain. But in actuality, Iris had built a good relationship with all the people in the house. Naturally, it didn't matter whether they were nobles or commoners. ...In other words, because of how much she was madly in love with Edward, she was driven by jealousy and held the heroine of the story, the daughter of a Baron, in contempt and made it a habit of slandering her.

Let me say it again, I sympathize with Iris... Or rather, this won't do. I am Iris now. Even if it's just for my sake, I must make Iris happy.

Now that I've prepared myself as much as possible, Rimé led me to father's study. And behind me was Tanya who came along.

"...Well then, young mistress."

"Yes, thank you. Rimé. And Tanya, please wait for me here."

"As you wish."

Now then, I've reached the battleground.

Standing before the massive door, I swallowed my saliva and took a deep breath... and then I knocked.

# Chapter 4: Confrontation

“...Enter.”

“Please excuse me.”

While a solemn atmosphere filled the room, I sat down right in front of father. With a clever countenance befitting of someone with a job title as the Prime Minister, in addition to the sharp glint in eyes which he usually dons while working, making the atmosphere around him even heavier... And now, since it seems like it has increased to about twice the usual, it made me feel like running away.

“...I apologize for taking much of your time today.”

“Heehh. So you do understand that point at the very least.”

“Not at all.”

Although it was subtle, a vein on father’s face twitched a little... or so it seems. That’s why I said, it’s really scary.

“Whether if it’s regarding father’s position as the Prime Minister or as your title of being a Duke, I do not think I’ve caused father any trouble. What I’m apologizing for is because father [chichi] is my father [otou-sama].”

“Is that so...? And why is that?”

“In the first place, I only caused a rumor to spread out of mischief. There’s also the issue of circumstantial evidence, so I don’t think it’ll affect father’s position as the Prime Minister... Above all, our side belongs to a Ducal House, and it will not fall to ruination just because of an engagement gone wrong. Even in the academy, I handled things in a way that they were sympathetic towards me. This way, they cannot make a big problem out of it. No matter how much clamor Edward-sama makes, it will only end up with a strict reprimand.”

“...About what happened inside the academy, I’ve already heard about it.”

“I have figured as much. And also, I apologize for saying this to father, the Duke... But in the first place, wasn't father opposed the engagement between Edward-sama and myself?”

“Why, that's right.”

“Because of my lineage, if it gets connected to the royal family through marriage, it might destroy the power balance of the royal family. Besides, apart from having a Duke and the Prime Minister father, mother is also the daughter of the General. It will still be acceptable if a marriage is formed with the First Prince. However, with the Second Prince, sooner or later, the Kingdom will be split into two.”

After listening to my words, for the first time since I arrived, father smiled... That said, it was one of those evil upward smiles along with sound effects that makes one feel nauseated... Although the person in question probably doesn't have that intention... Therefore, as I thought, I feel really scared.

“If that's the case, why do you think I allowed your engagement with Edward-sama to happen?”

About this question, I also thought about it considerably on my way here. If the situation calls for it, I would have definitely picked the former.

“...Because either one of them would be fine?”

“Exactly what do you mean by that?”

“Because if I got engaged to the First Prince, then young brother will also serve him and the First Prince's position will be firm. If my fiancée is the Second Prince, younger brother will be in the First Prince's faction. In that situation, I will be in charge of watching over the Second Prince to observe if he makes any unusual movements. Well... the former will probably take no time and effort, and truthfully, it's simpler, it would have been better for father.”

Actually, the story in the game didn't delve much into the story of the First Prince. Instead, it was depicted that the Second Prince will become the next King. It is actually quite common that the First Prince is the child



of the dead legal wife while the Second Prince is the child of the current concubine. One would think that the First Prince will naturally become King even while he's still in his mother's womb, but reality is not as easy as that.

The current concubine is a daughter of a Marquis, a House that's currently in the process of building up their strength, whereas the legal wife was a daughter of an Earl. Thus, when one looks at their family status, the legal wife's House is inferior to the concubine's. The King unexpectedly fell in love with the legal wife and used brute force to abolish all objection to making her his Queen, resulting in the current delicate balance.

And the aristocratic society who created that delicate balance are currently swaying and shaking, visible to the eye.

Inside the game, this kind of unpleasant situation was not portrayed. Even at the very end, the game had established that the First Prince was studying in another country. That's how it was supposed to be, so I didn't expect it to be this bad. But as expected, reality is harsh.

As for father, it's not inaccurate to say that he is serving the country and not the royal family. Serving as the Prime Minister, he is keeping a neutral position in the royal family's dispute. For example, if the situation was connected to the First Prince's faction, based on the law of the Kingdom, it is likely that he will be judged as inconsequential to the Kingdom and be cast away... If the royal family were to ever fight against each other, the government of the Kingdom will halt. If one thinks about it, it was the right decision.

"Nevertheless, younger brother is completely leaning against the Second Prince. Since that's the case, father should have been aiming for the annulment of my engagement with the Second Prince. I'm delighted for you, father."

Since that's the case, when it comes to my affair, if it's father, he probably wouldn't disinherit me. If it's just that much power, our House also has it. I implied that I did what I did because it was something that

father desired.

“HAHAhahaha.”

Father laughed looking really happy. However, even though he was laughing, I can only see him as a villain. If a third party sees him, they'll probably disintegrate completely.

“That's right. Certainly, I did wish to have your engagement with the Second Prince annulled. Although I have instructed to keep distance from the Second Prince in case of a disaster... But that guy, he has completely forgotten his duty and is now thoroughly part of the Second Prince's circle... However, are you fine with this, Iris? Did you not fall in love with the Second Prince?”

“Love is something like a sickness. When it cools down, that's the end of it... Even I, myself, think that it's a good thing it happened earlier rather than later.”

Besides, love of a hundred years will probably cool down as well.

“...Hmmm. However, Iris. This time, the current predicament is your blunder. Therefore, it is necessary that I take some measures.”

“...Is that so...”

As I thought, I couldn't escape the “deprivation of social status, church confinement, and disownment” course... In addition, Tanya seemed adamant that she comes along, I need to somehow convince her to stay.

“I'll have you go back to the territory and then be under house confinement. Of course, since you'll be far away from the Royal City, what you want to do in that remote place doesn't concern me.”

“...Eh?”

Doesn't that mean that anything I want to do will be “okay,” and there won't be any confinement?

“Also, it'll be a waste if you just stay there and do nothing. Because I will be giving you the ‘Feudal Lord Representative’ position, so at the very least, govern the territory properly.”

# Chapter 5: The Heart of a Parent, the Child knows not

Feudal Lord Representative? ...In other words, to govern the territory in place of father.

I wonder what I should say in this situation... Having an unexpected piece of good luck? Casting pearls before swine? Ah, either one of those are incorrect! Because it happened so suddenly, I couldn't find any words to make sense out of it.

"...Feudal Lord Representative, wouldn't that role usually go to younger brother who is the heir?"

"It doesn't matter since you'll be going to the territory anyway. And besides, that guy is currently experiencing the 'illness' you spoke of."

...Well, certainly. In order to experience being in love with the Baron's daughter, Yuri, it is necessary for him not to distant himself from the Second Prince, but rather be part of his entourage.

If he stays in the Royal City, since it's long vacation, a "kyaa kyaa, fufufu" development will definitely happen... Because she now belongs to the Second Prince, it should be fine if he distanced himself. In my brother's mind, he probably wants to be in a position where he can protect the happiness of the person he loves and watch over her.

"...I shall comply. I'll show you a territory that will not quiver 'no matter what state' the Royal City ends up becoming."

When I said that, father nodded in acknowledgment and made a 'you may retire' gesture, and I left the room.

\*

My name is Louis Dan Armelia. The Duke of Armelia, and also the current Prime Minister.

Now then, various surprising things occurred today.

First of all, my daughter, Iris, was expelled from school and had her

engagement annulled... To me, this is a route which I had predetermined.

Besides, I was originally against it, and now I was able to prevent my daughter from doing so. However, I didn't agree to let her get engaged... just so it can be annulled like this.

On the contrary, even if my daughter didn't do anything foolish, I would have canceled her engagement by claiming she's ill. In any case, I intended to have her be confined by the church before stepping in and removing her from the aristocratic society.

...In the first place, my daughter fell madly in love with Edward, the Second Prince, so she probably won't listen to anything I say, so this works out fine. That's what I thought.

However, when I finally met with my daughter, instead of looking humiliated as a result of being separated from the man she loves, she looked calm and refreshed. In addition, she splendidly executed my plans.

...How interesting. That's what I thought.

Because of my work, I didn't have much time to interact with my son and daughter, and the both of them were spoiled by my wife. As for my daughter, she grew up to be a typical noble who couldn't do anything by herself.

On the other hand, my son grew up to be one of those youngsters who were overconfident in their abilities, lovestruck, and naive... And when he starts working in the Royal City, I planned on thoroughly disciplining him.

But that aside, when that same daughter of mine spoke with me, as though she had some sort of enlightenment, executed what I had planned beautifully... The sad part of it all is, compared to my son, she has the ability to discern the flow of society. Furthermore, she is able to make minute decisions.

It was as if she had turned into a completely different person. Now that I think about it, this child will occasionally perform strange things, and while listening to her, it made me recall those times. The most extreme occasion was when she asked for commoners to be picked up and have

them by her side.

Instead of getting expensive presents, she chose to have commoner children be picked up to stay by her side... I thought she was going to make them her protégé. But when I finally approved of it, she didn't seem to have that kind of plan.

I thought that my daughter's phase of strange behaviors had ended... but when I looked at her expression earlier, she had the same look as before.

It is a waste not to put her to use. Before I knew it, I had already given her the position, "Feudal Lord Representative." I thought it was rather whimsical of me if I do say so myself. However, since Sebastian is currently living in that territory, she'll probably not do anything strange early on. Nevertheless, if Iris does perpetrate something, it'll be amusing to see.

All except for one thing. She wasn't able to guess one correctly. And that is the approval of her engagement to the Second Prince...

As the Prime Minister, I thought it would have been better for her to get engaged to the First Prince. The only reason I agreed to her engagement with the Second Prince was because it was my daughter's wish.

After all, I'm also just a man. A father who wants to spoil his daughter. And so, under the pretext of her keeping an eye on the Second Prince, I agreed to her engagement. Then... after my daughter's engagement was decided, in order for the royal family not to have disputes, I adjusted to a neutral stance.

Though, I cannot say anything about my son. Since he's overconfident in his abilities, he should do something on his own.

...However, under the surface, I wish that royal family's dispute over the throne intensifies. Sooner or later, my daughter would have been thrown in the maelstrom of the dispute. It was beyond my expectation that my daughter was able to get out of it on her own.

Therefore, I judged that it was best for her to withdraw from the aristocratic society until things had calmed down. Of course, if she had



any difficulties, I had every intention of helping her.

But when I looked at her appearance today, she doesn't need my help, only my protection.

On the contrary, she demonstrated that she had the potential to sail through the rough seas alone.

...I wonder what kind of move will she make. While thinking about it, I find myself looking forward to the future.

\*

### Translator's Message

So... did Iris' father take anyone by surprise? He's actually not that scary of a man Iris believes him to be.

# Chapter 6: Reality

...Good morning.

Now then, I, Iris, after receiving instructions from father, have moved to the Armelia territory. Today is the first day. The morning sun is dazzling, illuminating the territory.

As for what I'm doing so early in the morning, I'm practicing yoga. The first thing I did in the morning after waking up is to exercise, and more importantly, it's good for the health. ...Well, not quite. My body is a little chubby, you see. Because of my status of being a daughter of a Duke, I tend to eat luxurious and high-calorie meals as much as I desired, so it's natural for me to gain weight. And because of that, I decided on going on a diet and work hard in the mornings.

"Good morning, young mistress. ...eh, kyaaa!"

"...Oh, Tanya. Good morning."

I wonder why Tanya is so surprised? Ah, of course, Tanya also came to Armelia territory with me. I thought it was fine since it was not the "confinement route."

"Good morning, but that's not it. Young mistress, what on earth are you doing with that kind of appearance."

"This kind of appearance, you say..."

I looked at my own appearance. ...Linen tunic and pants which I procured with the help of a maid. Don't you think it's the perfect clothing to wear while exercising?

"For the goodness of my health, I intend to exercise like this every morning. I chose clothes that are easy to move in, is it no good?"

"Young mistress, exercise?"

A dubious and suspicious expression filled Tanya's face. Certainly, a noble young lady exercising, I can't really imagine it.

"Yes. I read in a book that it's not good for one's health if one doesn't

move their body. Because I intend to do this every morning, please do not be so surprised.”

“I understand... Please excuse my impoliteness.”

“It’s fine... But because I perspired, could you please have a bath ready?”

“Of course.”

After I got into the bath Tanya had prepared, I went and had breakfast. ...Because I exercised, I ate a lot for breakfast. Of course, I made sure it was well balanced.

“...After this, I would like to speak to Sebastian. Could you please make an appointment?”

“Certainly.”

The excellent Tanya immediately made an appointment with Sebastian, and the talk with him will take place before noon. Sebastian is a Steward and Butler of our House. Even when I say “butler,” he has been left to administer our territory substantially. In other words, a Super Butler.

When Sebastian entered the room, he somehow had the same smell as Rimé... In other words, he was dressed stylishly in a swallowtail coat. Even though he was moving briskly, he didn’t give the impression of someone in a hurry. Instead, his movements looked really beautiful... In addition to a head full of gray hair, his appearance is the definition of a dazzling butler.

“...You appear to be quite busy, I apologize for calling you in spite of your busy schedule.”

“Nay. By all rights, it should have been me who should have given you my greetings, I apologize.”

“Now then, without delay. Could you please gather and present to me the reports of the territory’s income and expenditures for the past three years?”

“I respectfully obey. However, what will you be doing with it?”

“I will be reading all of it, of course. I have, after all, accepted the “Feudal

Lord Representative” position given by the Duke. However, although I’m ashamed to say this, I currently have no information on how the territory is being managed or the present situation. Therefore, can you please give me one month?”

“One month, you say?”

“Yes. Because it is necessary for me to read all the reports, and to also inspect the land.”

“Certainly. However, if you wish to inspect the land, it will take approximately one week in order to make necessary preparations.”

“This time, in order to grasp the present condition, I intend to do the inspection incognito. Therefore, I’ll only need the minimum number of people to accompany me. Because I can vouch for those members, I will not need to trouble Sebastian.”

“I asked a presumptuous question, I apologize.”

“Not at all. Although I will be managing the territory from now on, I will nevertheless give you an important position. So please feel free to give advises.”

After Sebastian left, I called for Tanya to come.

“Tanya. Could you please call Ryle and Dida, and Rehme as well?”

“Certainly.”



After several minutes, Tanya entered the room with three other people who were about the same age as I... In other words, they were also people whom I have picked up.

Ryle has beautiful blonde hair, looking like any other young nobleman. And although he has a physique inferior to the Kingdom's Knights, he would not lose to them when it comes to a fight. Besides, he is more or less my bodyguard.

Dida, just like Ryle, serves as my bodyguard. Although he is a person who gets happy easily when praised or flattered and has an easy-going nature, his abilities are guaranteed.

Rehme is a girl who wears glasses and likes reading books. She currently serves as the librarian at our House. Speaking of the Duke's library, it has a collection of precious books. When comparing to my previous world, the collection of books are in the scale of junior high school level and above. Thus, she finds her role very important.

"It's been a long time since we've met, everyone."

Because the three people weren't able to come with me to the Royal City to attend the academy, they stayed in the territory to work.

Although I told them that they were free to do as they wish... and that it was agreeable for them to leave the territory, I am glad they stayed and yet apologetic at the same.

"It's been a long time, our princess."

The one who answered first was Dida. He answered it in his usual easy-going manner while smiling.

"Dida. You're talking to Iris-sama in that tone again..."

"It's fine, Ryle. Everyone is like family to me. When there's no one else around, I'd be delighted if you guys spoke to me the same way as the old days."

"However, Iris-sama..."

"Please, Ryle."

"...I understand."

Ryle approved while blowing out a large sigh.

"As everyone already know, my engagement with Edward-sama has been annulled, and I have returned to this territory."

"I absolutely cannot accept it. Why was Iris-sama's engagement not only annulled, but must be confined to the house?"

Rehme was similar to Tanya. She was also crying in vexation. Although there's a gap between her personality and appearance, she always spoke in a leisurely manner.

"That's right. Indeed, he is a young master with a poor eyesight."

"Thank you. However, this matter has already been settled. Besides, I am ecstatic to be able to live together with everyone in this territory once again. ...Now then, about the real issue at hand. As everyone know, I have been appointed as this territory's Feudal Lord Representative. And so, the first thing I want to do is inspect various places... Is everyone willing to accompany me?"

"I humbly accept."

"Princess' escort, huh~ It has a nice ring to it."

While two people showed their motivation, Rehme had a difficult expression on her face.

"The two of them escorts, so I understand. But what purpose do I have as a companion?"

"To put it simply, it's because I want your knowledge?"

"Eh?"

"If I'm not mistaken, you've extensively read every book available in the Duke's library? There were also books about the local history and geography. I want the knowledge you've acquired from reading those books. Besides, it differs greatly when there's prior knowledge while investigating various places."

Our House really has an amazing collection of books. Apart from being a noble house, those books have been collected by generations of generations of Prime Ministers. Every single large room in this mansion has already been filled with books.

As for genre, there's also a wide range of variety. Those books were, of course, collected based on the varying hobbies of different generations, such as Politics, Geography, Law, and various others. And since Rehme

had already read through all of those books, I trust that she has immense knowledge.

“...If that’s the case, I understand. I will work hard to fulfill my duty.”

\*

### Translator’s Message

I would like to thank Lir who has informed me of this misprint.

If you look at illustration (2 of 10), you will notice that Ryle and Dida’s name has been switched. Ryle is the handsome blonde guy with blue eyes while Dida is the easy-going guy with a sexy smile.



# Chapter 7: Studying

“The inspection is scheduled to take place in two days. If there’s anything you need, please look for Tanya and let her know respectively. Tanya. Please take care of the preparation.”

“I understand.”

“And also, is there anyone who can get in contact with Moneda?”

“Moneda, you say?”

“Yes, that’s right. If I’m not mistaken, he’s currently working for the Commerce Guild?”

The Commerce Guild is, as what the name implies, an organization that assembles stores. It is similar to the one Japan had during the Warring States period.

Moneda is also one of the children whom I picked up. But when I enrolled in the academy, he joined the Commerce Guild.

“Yes, and if I’m not mistaken, he’s currently in charge of accounts... I will definitely get in contact with him.”

“Then, Ryle. I’m counting on you to contact him. If possible, I’d like to have an appointment with him near the end of our itinerary.”

“I understand.”

After I broke down the details of our agenda during the inspection, the three people left. With perfect timing, Sebastian arrived with the documents I requested for earlier, and I started to read them.

As a matter of fact, I used to work at a tax office in Japan when I was still alive. Thanks to that, I became really skillful at reading reports on income and expenditures, and other related documents. I could follow the number trail without any problems.

“...Young mistress. It’s already time for lunch.”

“...Oh, my. It’s already that time?”

Time passed by rather quickly, and before I knew it, it was already time for lunch. Even so, I'm really thankful that someone had prepared it. To be honest, because I was so busy in my past life, I didn't have the time to eat proper meals.

After eating my meal quickly, I immediately returned to work. ...Ah, I chewed the food properly. I did not forget about dieting. Since I'm busy, it'll be just right if I forget to eat.

\*

My name is Tanya. I do not have a surname. A commoner, and because I used to be one of the residents of the slum, I never really cared about it.

Although I'm that kind of person, for some reason, I'm currently attending to the daughter of a Duke. For someone who was always distraught on what I will be eating and didn't know what tomorrow will bring, but for things to actually turn out like this... In the past, I never thought this would happen even in my wildest dreams.

The person whom I serve, young mistress Iris, is a young lady of noble birth. She is a lovely young woman who occasionally displays naivety.

If you ask me why a person like me is serving at one of the Kingdom's most eminent and distinguished family, it was because of the young mistress' whim. However, I am thankful for her whim. Although it was more than enough that she saved this life of mine from the verge of death...

But the young mistress said I was "important" and treats me like a friend, which I am grateful for. ...Therefore, I want to serve the young mistress wholeheartedly. That's what I thought. The young mistress gave a trifling existence such as myself a reason to keeping living.

However, this time, my important young mistress' engagement was annulled by a hateful man.

That fellow part of the royal family is really hard to understand.

Although it was acceptable that he did not see the magnificence of young mistress, but he not only fell in love with a daughter of a Baron and

neglected the daughter of a Duke, he also humiliated her in front of a large number of people which is outrageous. Unforgivable.

Nevertheless, when my important young mistress returned to the house, she already looked refreshed. Huh? And to think that you yearned for him exceedingly! And because it was something she wholeheartedly pursued, I wondered if there was something amiss... But when I thought about it, there was no reason for young mistress to have lingering affection or have regrets when it comes to that guy.

Because I do not know how Master will react to this incident, but when he had the free time, he had a meeting with the young mistress. Please do your best. Even if young mistress is sent to the ends of the world, it is my utmost wish to serve young mistress.

Fortunately, apart from being confined to the house in the territory, the young mistress was not reproved.

However, rather than being relieved, I was astonished at how quickly the incident was settled. ...Young mistress, will be the Duke's Feudal Lord Representative?

Master as well, I wonder what in the world was on his mind. When I heard it, I even doubted my own ears.

My most important young mistress is an educated noble lady who would never disgrace the title of nobility. Although I have yet to see it in action, but when it comes down to it, I just have a hunch that that's just the case.

After all, young mistress' schedule since childhood emphasized on etiquette. And in the academy, it was Arithmetic, Poetry, Literature, History, Geography, and other general subjects.

And sure enough, the young mistress is able to accomplish anything...

She gave me instructions one after another, and she is presently reading the documents Sebastian had given to her.

When I briefly took a glance at one of the documents, my eyes were immediately clogged with numbers, but she, on the other hand, made me wonder if she was reading it really quickly.

Occasionally, she would write something down in a notebook, and I realized that she really was reading it.

As I expected, compared to me, the young mistress is unfathomable. That's what I thought.

However, because young mistress seemed too concentrated that she doesn't notice the things around her, I vowed to get her to rest from time to time so she doesn't overwork herself.

# Chapter 8: Scout

Within two days, I finished reading all the documents right in time before the inspection. Not just the big towns, but even those rustic villages.

Of course, I wouldn't be able to inspect all the places. This time, the main goal is to visit the south where tax revenue has fallen in recent times, and the east where tax revenue is especially high.

I feel apologetic to Ryle and Dida, but our journey went smoothly without encountering thieves, so our inspection proceeded in an orderly manner. From time to time, I would ask Rehme about the villages to get a better grasp on the circumstances.

Like that, almost one month had gone by... and it was finally time for my appointment with Moneda. Truth be told, to me, my meeting with him is the first obstacle.

Our party was led to the Commerce Guild's drawing room. Unlike drawing rooms of aristocrats, the interior design of the Commerce Guild's drawing room was calming and profound instead of wasteful and luxurious. It's probably because different people value things differently.



“It’s been a long time since we’ve met, Iris-sama.”

The person who entered the room was a refreshing looking young man wearing glasses... That said, whenever I see his smiling expression, it can’t be helped that I can only find him suspicious.

“It’s been a long time, Moneda. Ah, please do not stand on ceremony. Because I’m traveling incognito today.”

“No, this is just my way of doing things.”

“Is that so. You’ve certainly been like this since way back.”

“And so, how may I help you?”

Suddenly getting straight to business, huh. There was no place to have that heartwarming talk about old times... But then again, Moneda has always been like this since the olden days.

“Well, Moneda. Even though it’s been a long time since we last met. And so, how has Moneda been doing lately?”

“My current condition? Well, to put it simply, fairly well.”

“I thought as much. As expected of the Commerce Guild’s Vice Chief of Accounts. Since that’s the case, you are, of course, aware of my movements?”

“Well... That’s about right.”

A bitter smile floated across Moneda’s face. It is a characteristic of a Merchant to gather information as quickly as possible. It will be a big problem to do business without understanding the current happenings. In other words, they naturally know the movements of aristocrats and where they spend their money.

“As you know, because of what had recently occurred, I have returned to the territory. By the way, Moneda. How has the guild been doing these days?”

“That is also going well.”

“Hmm, is that so? Even though the commerce in the Royal City have decreased?”

With a snap, the peaceful expression he had until now froze.

“Well, that’s no good. If what you’re thinking reflects too much on your face, your will immediately be seen through by your business partner.”

Hohoho, while laughing like a typical young lady, I thought the peaceful atmosphere would return, but Moneda’s expression remained stiff.

“Moneda, I’m sorry about that. I was only asking questions to trick you.

However, as I've said earlier, the commerce conducted in the Royal City have indeed decreased."

As for why, it's probably because the political situation in the Royal City is unstable. That said, it's not as if it has reached a critical point. This is something I came to understand after consulting the account books day after day.

Incidentally, I was really just asking him questions to trick him without any other reason whatsoever. Now that the political situation has become more and more difficult to predict, it is inevitable to be extra cautious compared to before... And I'm not saying it in just a merchant's point of view.

"...I've been done in. For reference, how did you come to that conclusion?"

"If you look at the present political situation, you'll naturally come to understand it. That said, Moneda. I didn't come all the way here just to be cruel to you."

"And so, how can I help you?"

The flow of the conversation has been restored. But I felt like it differs from the one earlier. Although we started on equal grounds... I was the first to break out and grasp the advantage of the conversation. This time, however, the other side seized the initiative. But perhaps he might still listen to this little request of mine.

"Moneda. I was wondering if you'd like to be in charge of a larger amount of money."

"A larger amount of money, you say? Are you trying to employ me for the House of the Duke?"

"Yes. However, I do not want to you serve the Ducal House, but rather, the Duke's territory."

"...That, exactly what to do you mean by that?"

"From now onwards, the Duke's territory will be undergoing a reform.



For one thing, the administration of our House will be divided between different people. In other words, I would like to ask you to manage the budget of this territory.”

“Why, did you choose me? I’m sure that the Duke’s House will are not lacking talented people.”

“It’s because you’re already familiar with the field. In addition, this reform will be carried out medium to long term. Because we will be pushing towards fundamental reform... knowledge is unnecessary right now. Although the basics are necessary to some extent... but for someone who is the current Vice Chief of Accounts, I’m sure you’ll do just fine. Above all, it’s because I know I can trust you. Trust, meaning that you will not be moved even when you’re bribed with money.”

“Hahaha, it has surprisingly turned into an impressive conversation. If what you say is true, I’m looking forward to what lies in the future territory of the Duke. ...However, excuse me for being impolite, but do you have the authority to appoint people?”

Ah, he doesn’t believe me. The majority of the reason is because father is not in the proximity... So perhaps he’s thinking that I’m fabricating information for my own exploit?

And therefore, I will reveal my last card here.

“Of course. Because at this time, I have accepted the position of being the representative of the Feudal Lord.”

At the same time, I showed him the Letter of Appointment. This was something father had handed to me before I left for the territory.

...Truthfully, I have yet to announce it publicly that I was appointed as the representative of the Feudal Lord. And I still have no intention of announcing it after this. Since it has a great effect when it comes to critical moments. ...Such as now.

I thought that he probably would have never imagined I would be appointed and the representative of the Feudal Lord, and indeed, when I looked at Moneda’s face, he had a surprised expression.

Moreover, as the Feudal Lord's proxy, father has placed all responsibilities of governing the territory to me. That authority is remarkable and is almost on an equal footing as the Feudal Lord himself. In other words, it was as if father is declaring that he is unsatisfied with young brother becoming his successor. But I am myself, and I will carry out my duties confidently from start to finish. Because it was also written in the letter, it can't be helped if people were surprised. ...Father as well, I wonder what he's thinking about.

On the other hand, because it was useful, I am very grateful for it.

# Chapter 9: Outcome

“...Thank you very much.”

After Moneda said that, he returned the letter respectfully.

“Well, how about it?”

“I will accept the offer with pleasure.”

“Oh, you sure made your decision quite quickly. I thought you would take some time to think about it.”

“It is important for a merchant to have the ability to make quick decisions.”

“Regardless, I am thankful. Now then, I would like to talk about the future plans in detail... I wonder, when will you have the time to visit me?”

“Please give me three days. Because I need to hand over all the work I have presently.”

“That suits me just fine. Then, in three days, please come to the house.”

“Certainly.”

Haaa~ I feel relieved as though a weight is lifted off my shoulders. I was able to pull Moneda in without any problems, and in three days time, I will also have a confirmation from Sebastian.

After accomplishing the job, I was able to return to the Duke's house with everyone.

\*

My name is Moneda. I'm currently serving the Commerce Guild in Armelia as their Vice Chief of Accounts. As to what kind of position the Vice Chief of Account is, he is the person in charge of the accounts in the headquarters.

To begin with, the main purpose of the Commerce Guild is to provide human resources and to mediate between fellow merchants among other things. It is an organization consisting of these so-called merchants.

A merchant must join the Commerce Guild without fail. If a merchant joins, he will receive protection and will only have to pay the merchant's tax.

The Vice Chief of Accounts is in charge of the funds to operate the Commerce Guild and to administer the merchant's taxes paid by the members of the Commerce Guild.

Although work is hectic, I find it challenging and enjoyable.

But one day, I had an appointment. The other party was Iris Lana Armelia. She was not only the daughter of the Feudal Lord of Armelia where I live, I am also indebted to her for picking me up from an orphanage.

But to be honest, I found it really troublesome... or so I thought. Although I am indeed indebted to her, it is a different story when it comes to work. I won't mix private matters with work.

I found out from my network of merchants that she has returned to the territory after her engagement was annulled, and she'll probably be asking me for something problematic... That's why I was quite suspicious.

...However.

"Hmm, is that so? Even though the commerce in the Royal City have decreased?"

When I heard the talk about business, it was as if a bomb had dropped.

Why do you know that kind of thing... In the first place, it's those kinds of questions that makes me suspicious. Indeed, an astute person will be able to understand it. Nevertheless, that was something only someone who concentrated on account books on a daily basis would know.

Why would someone like her who is unrelated to such things know about this... These words were not something a person who has been surrounded by young ladies and young masters in the Royal City would say.

This, I will be eaten if I underestimate her. She gives me the same tense

feeling I had when I met with an influential person soon after I first started my job. However, I was too slow to notice. The initiative of the conversation was already in her grasp.

I, who had lost the opening round, once again broached the subject. And once we have reached a critical point, she said she had a “favor.” As I thought, she was just waiting for the right timing to attack.

Although I was surprised that she had a favor, I was even more surprised to know what that favor was.

Reformation of the territory as a whole? Mid-term and long-term reform? By no means would I have ever thought those words would come from this young mistress.

I thought it was interesting. If she was the same person as she was in the old days, I would have immediately come out and tell her that it was nothing but a pipe dream. However, it was clear that she had the proper understanding of the present situation, and I have our previous conversation to remind me of it.

Nevertheless, in the end, that was all it was. I threw a fastball with the intention of considering it. Since I didn't think she had the authority to personally make decisions regarding the management. In other words, the pathway the promising future cannot be seen.

On the contrary, she was able to “clear” it completely.

I never expected for her to be the Feudal Lord's proxy!

Finally, the strongest card I had has been eliminated. Really, there is no need to consider anything further.

...And then I acted quickly. I accepted, and when she left to return home, I immediately prepared for someone to take over.

In three days, I wonder what kind of plans she'll be broaching. That is something I'm looking forward to.

# Chapter 10: Conducting a Conference

Now then, three days had gone by in no time, and as promised, Moneda knocked at the gate. With that said, I will now be holding the first conference. First of all, I should reveal my plans in order for them to understand.

“Everyone, thank you for gathering here today. The first meeting will now commence.”

Although I said that, the people present were those whom I can trust... In other words, the people who went with me during the inspection, Moneda, Sebastian, and Sei as well. Sei is one of the children whom I brought to the house when I was young, and he is now helping Sebastian with the management of the mansion.

“...First of all, I would like to express my ideas. For one month, I have inspected our territory and have confirmed things with Sebastian... Compared to other territories, our territory is abundant.”

This was really the case. From the Royal City, all the way to our territory has a springtime weather all year long. Thus, the farming industry in the southern part of the territory is prosperous, and since it's also facing the sea, trade can be conducted. It is not incorrect to call this territory the second capital city of the Kingdom.

“When I went to inspect the territory, my impression of it is... Is similar to a ripe fruit. Although it's fine to eat it now, if we wait a little longer, it will eventually rot. That's what I think.”

I guess they did not expect me to have this kind of impression since they kept blinking their eyes in bewilderment. Especially Sebastian and Sei.

“...The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. And because the stores lack new commodities, the air has become stagnant.”

For someone like me, who used to live in a capitalist country such as Japan, I belong to the pro-competitive society faction, so I believe that it can't be helped for wealth to accumulate to some extent. However, this

territory is different. To begin with, it's impossible to display competitiveness.

For as long as they remain unskillful, there will never be an opportunity for them to climb up.

"If the people living in the territory are not rich, the territory will never become rich."

That's how it works. When the market is limited, it will eventually collapse. In other words, if we do not actively participate in prospering the people, with the current economic flow, our territory will decay.

When I casually looked around, I saw question marks hovering above their heads.

"In other words... To put it simply, I want to create a territory where children will not have to go through the things you have experienced in the past."

Looking convinced, everyone nodded their heads in agreement while smiling.

"It is our aspiration to achieve a large goal. It will take a hundred years before the territory will develop to something comparable to our goal, and the first thing we must do is improve the quality of life of the people. Therefore, in order for this to happen, we need to push forward with the reforms. First of all, I would like to utilize the funds the Ducal House presently has to help manage the territory. After that, establish a bank, centralize the government affairs, taxation system reforms, roadway maintenance, compulsory education..."

"...U-umm. What exactly is a bank?"

While I was talking, Sei interrupted me and asked timidly.

"Ah, my apologies. Because I was too absorbed, I got in way over myself. Regarding the bank, it is my intention to let Sebastian, Sei, and also Moneda handle of it. I will talk to you about it in detail a little later. ... However, the bank will not be realized unless we first help the people prosper and reform the taxation system here in our territory."

“In other words, you want to use the taxes collected from the people to manage the territory, and gather money from elsewhere to maintain the Ducal House?”

“That’s right, Moneda.”

“Specifically, what are you intending to do?”

“For starters, launch a business.”

When I said that, the atmosphere of the conference froze momentarily.



# Chapter 11: Commercialization

“...Start a business, you say...”

Sebastian and Sei are probably against it. Their facial expressions turned a little overcast.

“To do something you’re not used to, there are many examples of that. I think it’ll be better if you stop thinking in that direction.”

Moneda, who was part of the Commerce Guild, was also against it. However, if money is not earned, my vision will really end up being nothing but a pipe dream.

If we meticulously maintain the mansion and cut down our expenses for food and luxurious clothing... it means we will be able to allocate that budget for road maintenance and other things.

But after taking the reputation of the Duke’s household into consideration, we can’t really cut down too much on expenses... Thus, I came up with an idea, and that is to start a business. It was fitting since I found something interesting during the inspection.

“Well, Moneda. Could you please not stop me before you hear me out? Since it might be possible to make some profit.”

When Moneda heard what I said, a dubious expression appeared on his face.

“How should I say this. I am after all a daughter of a noble. For someone like me who has never stood on the battlefield alongside other merchants, and to suddenly announce that I want to start a business, your reaction is only natural.”

“...No, please excuse me.”

“It’s fine. Now, continuing with what I was saying. I would like to sell this commodity. Rehme, please take that thing out.”

“I understand~”

The thing Rehme took out from the bag was a brown fruit.

“...This is...?”

Sebastian and Sei, who seemed to have never seen one before, scrutinized it.

“This is a fruit called cacao~ It seems that these are harvested in the tropical regions in the south, and the locals will occasionally grind them and make them into a drink~”

That’s right, cacao. The land extending from the Royal City to our fief experiences springtime all year long. Our fief expands from north to south, hence the southern regions have a tropical climate. With that being the case, cacao appeared in that region.

“...I have heard of it. But if I’m not mistaken, because it is too bitter, it is not something fit for drinking...”

As expected of Moneda. The Commerce Guild should be well aware of these kinds of products. ...But when I was doing the inspection with Rehme, I was quite surprised to discover it. This child really has knowledge about almost anything... After all, she also knew the step by step process executed by locals to manufacture the raw cacao fruit into a drink. You are also probably surprised.

“As I thought, it has yet to be commercialized. I’m relieved to hear Moneda say that.”

“Ye-yes...”

No way, are you planning to sell this? Also, what’s with your expression brimming with confidence? Is probably what he’s thinking.

However, I do have plenty of confidence in this. No matter what anyone say, desserts are, after all, important to nobilities. ...For example, during tea time.

“...Tanya. Open the door.”

“Certainly.”

When Tanya opened the door, one of the cooks in our household, Merida, was waiting outside. By the way, Merida is another one of the

children I picked up when I was young. Tanya, Ryle, Dida, Moneda, Rehme, Sei, and Merida. These seven people were the children whom I picked up.

Because Merida wanted to be a cook, she became one of the cooks in our household. She is the person who cooks my meals, and because I am dieting, I made various requests, but she nevertheless delivered. In other words, she is a splendid cook.

“This is a dessert Merida made using cacao as the main ingredient.”

What appeared was, of course, chocolate. Although it was something I was familiar with, everyone else looked at it in wonder.

“Please try it.”

Everyone timidly ate the strange and unknown food.

“...Delicious!”

However, after eating a mouthful of it, there was nothing but words of praise.

“This is, something made from cacao, right? Certainly if it is this... By the way, how will this be priced?”

“Because sugar was used, I intended to price it a little high. The target demographic will be nobles, and because it uses an abundant of high-class ingredients, I’m intending to market it as a luxury food. But sometime in the near future, I will eventually make it a low-priced commodity where more people will be able to buy the product. Now then, Merida. Please bring in the others.”

“Certainly.”

What was brought in a while ago was a nondescript plate of milk chocolate. What was brought in next were plates of dark chocolate and various assortments of chocolates such as truffles.

“Although these snacks were also made from cacao beans just like the one earlier, the taste is completely different. Please try it.”

This time, compared to earlier, everyone ate it without hesitation.

“Wow~ Delicious! I like this round looking one~”

“As for me, I like this plain one and it’s easy to eat.”

Everyone respectively took a liking to the different snacks depending on their preferences. I am relieved that the overall evaluation is favorable.

“This way, there’s a variety of flavors. As someone who was part of the Commerce Guild up until recently, what are your impressions, Moneda?”

“It is a commodity that’s never been heard of before... With the proper advertising, it can be launched immediately. I believe these have that much appeal. It’s also a good thing that the target demographic has already been established.”

“Thank you. Since that is the case, Sei. I would like for you be my hands and feet, and help me open up a market outlet where this commodity can be sold.”



“...Me? Although it might be forward of me to say this but, wouldn’t Moneda be a better choice...?”

“Moneda will be involved with the establishment of the bank I spoke of earlier. I consider that he is the right person for the job because negotiations must be made with the Commerce Guild one way or another. In addition, with the nobility being the targeted demographic, it would be better if someone like you, who is working in the Ducal House, to be in

charge of this, and you'll also be able to respond quickly.”

“...I respectfully obey. I will do my best to answer to your expectations.”

“With that, it is settled. We will now focus on how we will get this commodity out in the market on the right track. First things first, Sebastian. Please draw up a contract with the village harvesting the cacao beans. Also, Ryle and Dida, please think about how many people will be necessary to secure the transportation from the village to the house and give me a report. I'm sure you remember the roads we passed through when we did our inspection, right?”

“I understand. I will start on it immediately.”

Sebastian, Ryle, and Dida stood up.

“Merida, please make more of these snacks for trial purposes. I'll hand over any other recipes I think of afterward. And Tanya, please make preparations to write a letter to mother.”

“...To the Madam, you say?”

“Yes. There is no other person better than mother when it comes to advertising. If we send her the commodity, she will advertise it.”

“Certainly.”

“Moneda, please proceed in establishing a firm. When you do so, please take Sei along with you. If possible, please secure a place where this product can be manufactured. ...For the next three months, because it will be the firm's busiest and important time, I'm sorry about this, but will you be willing to offer your help?”

“Of course. There is no way I will miss the chance of taking part of something this interesting.”

“Thank you. Rehme, please stay behind because there's something I'd like to confirm with you. Regarding the average price of products currently out in the market, if it's you, you are familiar with them, right?”

“Yes~ If it's within the span of the last fifteen years, please ask me anything.”

“Then, I thank everyone in advance for your individual work. If anything happens please consult with me by all means.”

# Chapter 12: Conglomerate Established

Now then, with that kind of notion, we established a conglomerate. The name of our conglomerate is “Azura Conglomerate.” With everyone demonstrating their excellence in their respective positions, we managed to introduce our commodity to the market in no time.

When I sent the product to mother for trial purposes, she apparently immediately held a tea party and presented them, and in no time, it became a popular amongst the nobility. Presently, the conglomerate is exhilarated that the product is so popular, to the point where we cannot catch up with the orders.

Hurray for reincarnation knowledge.

An idea was proposed that we increase the production line, but that proposal was turned down. Since the target demographic are the nobility, rather than increasing the production, it would be better to maintain the pace to keep the scarcity value.

To add on to that point, in order to enforce a firm image of the brand, a lily motif has been imprinted on the boxes of the chocolates. ...This was done in preparation when competitors appear in the future. Although for now, one has yet to appear.

Presently, different from the noble line, a separate line for commoners is in the process of being established.

To be more specific, chocolate itself is still a luxury food. What we are considering is to open a cafe and sell food such as chocolate cream crepes and chocolate coated fruits. ...Or rather, we have already found a place and we have also guaranteed the distribution route for the ingredients. Thus, it won't be long until the operation starts running.

Sei has been very, very busy running here and there.

Although I said that, it's not as though I'm unoccupied myself. Now that the conglomerate has taken off, I am concurrently managing the conglomerate and preparing for the reforms for the fief.



Even though my schedule is hectic, I find it somewhat nostalgic because my previous life was also like this.

Let's put aside those thoughts for now and move on to the first thing on the agenda. First, is a meeting with Sei.

"...The present state of affairs is written in those documents."

"The noble line is doing well as usual. How are you doing with securing workers?"

"It is proceeding well, so please be at ease. In just a short while, a lot of chefs came to apply to the conglomerate. Unknown food... because of this matter, a lot of people wanted to learn how to make them."

"I see. If that's the case, please introduce the "day off" system I talked to you about last time. Speaking of Merida, if you judge that any of those chefs are suitable, please refer them to her because I want her to start another line. Since the preparations are ready, it's about time we start on it. Thus, I would like for her to check it out in my place."

"As you wish."

"In the future, not only do I want to distribute our products in the Royal City, I also want them to circulate to other areas... For that to happen, we will need to secure the distribution channel to those areas... I wonder if we should just establish a transportation department? Tanya, please call Rehme and Moneda for me."

Like I requested, Tanya immediately went to call Rehme and Moneda.

"...Moneda, how do merchants normally secure the distribution of commodities?"

"Well... If it's a small to medium-sized store, the merchant will personally bring it to those areas. If it's a large store, they will hire escorts or take their own subordinates along and personally deliver it themselves."

"...If that's the case, as I thought, it would be a good idea to establish a transport department. Rehme, please immediately pull up a map. After that, along the roads of this Kingdom, please pick out areas with flat

grounds and give me information about their climate and the difference in temperature. In addition, calculate how much time it'll take to get there from our fief. Please discuss with Ryle how many escorts will be necessary and what the cost will be.”

“Yes~! I wonder what is going to start this time around~?”

“Right now, I guess you can say that the transportation department is in development? But before we put it on paper, we need to consider how much it will cost. Then, Sei. First of all, make a draft of employment for those workers you mentioned earlier, and also, talk to Merida to keep her in the loop. Rehme as well, please work on it immediately. Tanya, please call Sebastian. And Moneda, please remain here, let us now develop the concept of a bank.”

After I gave my orders in rapid succession, everyone immediately moved to carry them out. Or rather, I think it's about time we increase the number of staff. Although I wanted to slowly increase the staff... we are overwhelming insufficient in numbers. If Sei continues this way, he will eventually collapse... and things wouldn't be good.

Oops, my head needs to switch gears, switch gears.

“...Then, Moneda. Do you have any questions regarding what we talked about before?”

It was about time to launch a full-scale campaign and push forward the reformation of the fief. Meanwhile, I conveyed the idea of establishing a bank to Moneda before the time was right.

Although the current market is circulating money, there is no institution to control it. This was also something that surprised me... I wonder if the citizens of the fief deposit their money in their draws? If not, it seems like they deposit it in the Commerce Guild. It seems like the Commerce Guild also offers that kind of services, and people can withdraw the amount of money they deposited in any Commerce Guild branch, which is very convenient.

However, the Commerce Guild does not do it professionally, they really just keep the money entrusted to them.

“So, do I have any questions for me up to this point?”

“No. However, you did really well to think of this idea.”

Well, I wasn't exactly the person who came up with this idea. Although I wanted to say that, I can't, so I remained silent and smiled.

“For starters, please purchase a building that will be used for the bank. After that, please use my name to arrange a meeting with the Guild Master of the Commerce Guild and other Presidents of important conglomerate.”

“I understand.”

# Chapter 13: Meeting

After that, the next several weeks of efforts was spent preparing for the establishment of the bank, such as ensuring the building and securing the equipment... As usual, there is a mountain load of things to be done.

Finally, the promised day of the meeting had arrived. The designated location was the Headquarters of the Commerce Guild here in the Duke of Armelia's fief.

When I had a meeting with Moneda in this place, I thought that the interior was calming and profound, and it's still the same as always.

"...Now then, everyone. Thank you for taking time off of your busy schedules to gather here today."

I gave a greeting to start things off. Besides, I really am extremely grateful to the members who had gathered here today because they genuinely do all have very, very busy schedules.

"No, not at all. We were also looking forward to meeting the President of the conglomerate that has risen to the spotlight recently."

He said with a sharp glint in his eyes. A-as expected... an impressive full mark.

"I didn't meet everyone here today as the President of Azura Conglomerate, but as the proxy of the Feudal Lord of the Duke of Armelia's fief."

"Oh, as the proxy of the Feudal Lord, is it?"

"Yes. Otherwise, it will be impossible for me to gather everyone today. After all, our conglomerate is still a newcomer."

"How humble. I've heard all about your activities."

"If that's the case... I will happily accept your words of praise. However, today's business is a different matter..."

The atmosphere in the surrounding froze instantly.

"First of all, I would like to establish a bank in our fief. By all means, I

would like everyone to use it.”

“...A bank, is it?”

“Yes.”

“Excuse my impoliteness, but what exactly is it?”

“To put it simply, it is a developed version of the repository services provided by the Commerce Guild. Its main purposes are depository services, money order services, and financing services.”

“Depository services? Financing... services? I’ve never heard of those before... What kind of significance do they have?”

“Let’s start with the depository services. It is similar to the services that the Commerce Guild has been providing, where a conglomerate or an individual can entrust their funds. Those kinds of services will also be conducted in the bank.

The funds the people part of the Commerce Guild spend to constantly hire escorts will no longer be necessary. Don’t you think it’ll be an advantage for the Commerce Guild?

Furthermore, you can settle transactions between accounts with the bank. For example, if mutual parties deposit funds in the bank, cash reserves can be moved between accounts and thus will not have to carry cash with them.”

About the depository services, I thought it would be fine to make similar to the ones in Japan. In other words, a bankbook and seal. However, since it’s only been recently established, it’ll be difficult to process the account transfers.

Thus, I thought it would be a good idea for the conglomerates to create a checking account. Also, because it is likely that people will travel to different regions, it would be a good idea to create cheques and drafts.

From here on out, since I intended on drawing up family registers, and wondered if it’ll be a good idea to create IDs along with it. In addition, as proof that that person’s ID does indeed belong to them, there should be a

stamp on the back.

Nevertheless, it's not really necessary to have everything the same as Japan... Or rather, let's polish this idea later. Since the family registers will take some time, it'll be fine if it's introduced after the bank has already been properly established.

As for the seal, since there are no kanji characters in this world, as I thought, it'll have to be the crest of nobles. While I was pondering on what should be done, I went to consult with Moneda.

It was the same for the money order services, I had to consider how to handle those after the an account has been opened. Machines don't exist here. When the patron opens an account in the bank, each patron will receive an account book, and using this method, they can deposit their money.

By the way, we have already established the guard division, and I intend to put them to use. Guards are necessary for banks, especially when we start shipping... right? Of course, it's not as though the guards had excellent qualifications upon being hired... thus, an initial investment was needed.

"...I see. However, I wonder if that will really be safe? After all, they are important funds. There must not be any risk."

"Of course, it will be placed under the protection of our House. I can guarantee the quality of the security guards who will be protecting the funds. On the other hand, if a fraud were to happen, I will use my position to apprehend the criminal."

"Hmmm. Then what about financing services?"

"As for financing services, it lends out the collected funds... In other words, money lending. Of course, strict conditions will be imposed... And if one is able to meet the requirements, they will be able to borrow capital. For example, funds to start up a new business?"

"That is interesting."

"You can entrust your money at any given time and only withdraw the

necessary amount. Transactions will be easier to settle. In addition, if you need capital, you can borrow them when necessary. “Our House” will be in charge of the safety of the funds. And because it will be under our House, the funds will always remain secure unless our House falls into ruin. ... What do you think? Earlier, you kindly complimented the management of the conglomerate, but what do you think about Feudal Lord returning the profit to the fief? After all, the fief’s money belongs to the fief.”

Although I said that, it’s not like the fief will be guaranteed to receive funding from the bank. Especially when the people in front of me are not willing to make direct investments. After all, I intended to spend the tax money collected from the people of the fief for the fief.

That said, if our conglomerate did not succeed, most of the taxes collected would have been spent on maintaining the Ducal House instead of being allocated to road maintenance. They are not mistaken about where the profits of the conglomerate goes, are they?

“In exchange for that, what will you be demanding from us?”

“As for establishing the bank, I do not have any request in mind. Because the most important is to return the money of the fief to the fief in order to develop it.

Ah, but the Commerce Guild has always been in charge of this, so I would like to ask permission if it would be fine for us to ‘headhunt’ those people and employ them for the bank?

Since there is a lot a things to learn, it would be better if we hire people with experience. Also, although we have prepared for the bank’s headquarters to be here, we have yet to prepare where to set up other branches. Thus, I would be grateful if the Commerce Guild has any suggestions.”

“As for our guild, since we have always been in a deficit in this area, we will be more than happy with the takeover... So if it’s only that much, it will be our pleasure to cooperate.”

Alright, the prospect of establishing the bank is looking bright.

“...Then, next item the agenda. Shall I move to the “main issue” involving the conglomerates now?”

The atmosphere which had relaxed a little turned tense again. There is no reason to end it here. ...Since the people who had gathered here today have a really busy schedule... it will be a wasted opportunity if I do not grasp this chance.

“About the bank we were talking about earlier, it has been decided that the tax collected from the people of the fief will be invested on road maintenance of the roads in the fief. And also, there one more thing. The establishment of an ‘academy.’”

“Academy... you say? Such as the one in the Royal City?”

“If it’s that kind of disadvantageous academy, there’s no need to use the tax money to build it. What I would like to build is an academy that has a primary division which will teach students how to read and write, and an advanced division, which it teach specialized skills to students... The fief’s taxes will be used for this because I plan on passing a bill, making primary education compulsory in our fief. Presently, I want to direct everyone’s attention to the advanced division.”

“In what way?”

“Frankly speaking, I would like you to invest in it. Although funds will be acceptable, materials and equipment will also be welcomed.”

“Wouldn’t it be fine to ask the bank you spoke of earlier to finance it?”

“The bank is dependent on the funds of the Ducal House and the taxes of the people of the fief. If the bank is used to finance something so extensive, it will ruin the balance of income and expenditure, and will result in the collapse of the bank management.”

“There is some truth to that. If that’s the case, wouldn’t it be fine if we wait until the academy has been founded?”

“If possible, I would like to build the academy as soon as possible. Because people are important resources in our fief, it will be a shame if we leave them alone and don’t polish them.”



“...Hmmm. What is the concept of the academy?”

“I will distribute the materials now, please look at them.”

Sebastian who came with me distributed the documents to everyone. These are the materials I spent preparing for the last several weeks. ... Thanks to that, I have not had much time to sleep lately.

“First of all, I would like to establish a Medical and Pharmaceutical department. Afterward, Fief Administration and Accounting department.”

“A medical department... you say?”

The conglomerate directors had surprised expressions on their faces. I guess it's only natural. Because the doctors in this world are only employed by royalties and aristocrats, and thus the knowledge of medicine is not widespread.

As for the value of such knowledge... every member from the conglomerate can understand it. Normally, in order to learn such knowledge, a high remuneration must be paid.

...That's right, “usually,” that is. I also desired to employ a few of those people. I wanted to employ two or three people for our House, however, I don't know where mother heard about this information, but she made an introduction.

That person seemed to be quite idle. I mean, up until a while ago, that person was relaxing in the countryside. Then, that person suddenly wanted to cultivate the younger generation and came here.

As for me, I would like to take advantage of mother's connections to negotiate with the doctor and for future negotiations done by the conglomerate by all means.

By the way, farmers and scholars will act as instructors in the agriculture department. For classroom learning... and hands-on skills.

As for the scholars, I once again took full advantage of father and mother's connection to gather them. Afterward, I'm also intending for Rehme to stand as a lecturer.

## Translator's Message

I was informed that this novel has reached over 800 readers in NovelUpdates in approximately one week and increasing. So on behalf of the author and myself, we would like to thank all the readers for supporting this amazing novel. Thank you. bows

# Chapter 14: Negotiations of the Young Lady

“Knowledge is also an asset, is it...”

“Yes.”

“However, it’s because the number of doctors is scarce that’s why they are valuable. If they were to increase in numbers, their value will probably drop...”

“What are you saying. Right now their numbers are far from enough.”

The people can consult with a healer if there is one living in town. That said, because not many have the proper education, they can’t really be counted upon. In addition, in remote areas and frontier regions, it is said that there aren’t any practitioners and people can only rely on dubious remedies.

“I don’t think I need to say this but, there is profits to be made when there is an increase in the number of doctors among the population. That said, the conglomerates will be able to make lucrative profits by making equipment used by doctors and medical ingredients. In addition, with research, we can expect new medicines to be developed.”

If one looks closely, a director of a conglomerate who deals with sales of medicines was sorely tempted. Un, it has probably captured his interest.

“As for the Fief Administration and Accounting Department, its aim is to bring up talented people to make the future of the fief more prosperous. ... Especially the Accounting Department, don’t you consider that is related to everyone?”

“I can more or less understand how Fief Administration will involve us... But how is the Accounting Department related to us?”

“Please look at the third page of the document.”

“This is...”

“This is a short excerpt of Azura Conglomerate’s account book.”

“This is, an account book!?”

Everyone looked really amazed when they viewed the contents. In this world, there is no concept of Double Entry Bookkeeping! I can't believe they don't have something this convenient. Even though people said that “Double Entry Bookkeeping is one of the most impressive invention born from the knowledge of humans.”

What is even more surprising is that their format is not unified. Some conglomerates use Single Entry Bookkeeping while other conglomerates use the profit-and-loss bookkeeping method by counting their products... That's how it's been until now. For me, who wants to promote the capitalist system, I cannot accept this.

“This way, one can immediately see when payments are made. There's also another document called a ‘balance sheet,’ and with this, you can easily discern the assets and liabilities. In addition, there is an income statement which immediately shows the profits and expenses. As a result, one can easily see the “quantitative” value of the conglomerate.”

I thought that it would be a benefit to guide merchants with experience and good intuition, and with this, they will be more unified in the future. Well... there is also my desire to eagerly practice something related to accounting job I used to have in my past life.

“When you want to apply for a loan at the bank, you'll need to submit this form. After all, with the tax reform happening in the near future, poll tax will be eliminated.

With this account book, one can easily read the report of how much profit is made, and you'll have to pay the appropriate tax according to this. Of course, there will still be loopholes in this taxation system.

Nevertheless, with the taxation system being based on your assets, you'll be able to save on taxes. When one takes some time to consider it, one will find that it will be a big help for everyone.”

“...Do you have any authority to change the taxation system?”

“Yes. I am not just acting as the Feudal Lord's proxy. Just like what's

written in this letter, I have been given the position to administer the fief with equal authority as the Fief Lord.”

“...If one enrolls in that academy you speak of, will they be able to learn the method of your conglomerate’s account books?”

When a regular person looks at the account books, they might not be able to understand the value of it... However, as expected of the directors of the conglomerates, they noticed the value of this book.

“Yes, of course.”

“I’ve been beaten... I didn’t think you’d bring out such a big bait, or rather, the big bait will probably prove to be very successful...”

“Yes. There are also other advantages, you know? For example, when the agricultural department starts researching on cultivation improvements, and if they meet with success, those methods will be handed over to the conglomerates who invested in this. What do you think? Isn’t it tempting?”

“Haha, it is tempting.”

“Now then, I would like to talk to the directors of the conglomerates who wants to make an investment. I do not want to take up any more time of those who are not interested.”

To my proposal, only two people left their seats. Oh, I thought that at least half of the people will leave.

“A lot of people surprisingly remained... No matter what is it fine like this?”

“Iris-sama. We are, after all, “First-rate Merchants” and we are proud to take part in anything that will yield profits. Rather than being bound by short-term profit, we are Merchants who are moved by large long-term profits. With large profits, it will only be natural to have some risk. And we’ll only make our decisions after considering the risks and returns. In conclusion, we will never let an opportunity to make large profits slip by.”

“Well~... I guess that’s only natural.”

“If you’re nothing but an average noble young lady, we’ll probably just throw the idea away as though it’s naught but a pipe dream. However, you not only created a conglomerate with your own hands, you have already reached our standings... No, climbed even higher. And what we value is this ability of yours.”

“...I am once again proud to be praised by you. Because it is you first-class merchants who are supporting our fief.”

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### Translator’s Message

I would like to clear up something:

When Iris said that she wants the fief to have compulsory education, she meant that she wants the people to attend the ‘primary division’ where they can learn to read and write. The advanced division is not compulsory.

# Chapter 15: Inside the Carriage

“...Even so, Iris-sama sure has the guts.”

Moneda brought up the topic while we riding the carriage. The people inside the carriage right now are Moneda, Sebastian, and I. Dida, on the other hand, was sitting outside the carriage acting as our driver.

“Oh my, how impolite. Even I was actually very tense.”

“Nevertheless, it didn’t look that way at all to me. The main point is that I never thought you would approach those members to talk about a business proposal.”

“If that’s the case, Moneda, why did you think I called them for?”

“Of course, to report about the establishment of the bank...”

“I did do that.”

“No, I didn’t mean implement that you didn’t...”

I started laughing unintentionally. I was also feeling really nervous back then, it was a situation similar to walking on a tightrope. After all, those documents took three weeks to put together. Even though the documents were stuffed with a lot of details... everything went well with flying colors. I felt uneasy thinking about the various different questions they’ll have regarding the overflowing materials.

“However, why can we not have the bank fund the educational institution? In addition, there’s also the matter regarding the road maintenance...”

“It is impossible to sever the distribution of goods. However, if the distribution channels have been improved, the circulation of money also improves... Since that’s the case, it would be better if we start as quickly as possible. In addition, if those funds are returned to the people, wouldn’t it be easier for children be able to attend the academy?”

Of course, the primary division will be completely free of charge. Nonetheless, I don’t believe there will be a lot of people pleased with the

idea. Especially those people living in remote areas.

However, if funds were allocated to these “Public Works” such as road constructions, it will silence those people, circulate money amongst them, and revitalize the economy.

“Smart people have probably already noticed the benefit of road maintenance. Distribution of goods will improve, and because a lot of materials and food will be needed to provide for the worker during the construction... their businesses will prosper greatly.

When an investment is made, the Duke’s House will be indebted to them, and will also receive information on researched materials. ...When they consider these things, I thought they will jump at the chance. The only thing I had to worry about is not being eaten up.”

“Young mistress, you’ve actually considered things up to that point...”

“Oh my, did you think I didn’t take them into consideration?”

“No, I did not mean to say such things.”

“Is that so? Well then, Moneda. When we get back, please go to the bank headquarters and open up the bank. Just as we have rehearsed before, start accepting deposits, opening accounts, and various other procedures.

After that, please secure the funds for road maintenance. ...In other words? Moneda. Please prepare not to have any holidays for a while. Things will become really busy.

“It’s exactly what I was hoping for.”

“Sebastian, you’ll also be very busy. Please consult with Rehme the order of which to conduct the construction work as well as making more efficient roads. Also, please prepare documents with the calculation of expenses for the construction and road maintenance.”

“I understand. I have already finished discussing it with Rehme-dono, and the calculation of the expenses is done. All that’s left is to submit the documents.”

“As expected of Sebastian. Please submit those documents to me. I will



take a look at it immediately. If possible, I want to turn it over to Moneda so that we can start on it right away.”

\*

My name is Sebastian. I don't have a surname... However, I take pride in serving the House of the Duke of Armelia for generations.

By the way, my work consists of managing the mansion as well as the fief instead of the present head, the Prime Minister who is busy in the Royal City most of the time. Because the Duke's fief is a genuinely extensive land, it is impossible for me to manage it closely, so I utilize my vast contacts. ...Or at least, I used to.

When the young mistress accepted the position of the Feudal Lord's proxy, my calm life changed dramatically. ...To sum it up with one word, busy. I am exhausted.

With me managing the both mansion and fief at the same time, a fellow servant came up to me and asked, “When will you have the time to rest?” And this happened quite often. Because I'm like that, I have complete admiration for the way the young mistress works.

To be honest... when the young mistress arrived, I thought that she will leave everything to me... At least, that's what I thought. But the moment the young mistress arrived, she asked me for the fiscal financial report of the fief, read it with extreme speed, and went out to inspect the fief vigorously.

Then, she launched a conglomerate and made a fortune in a blink of an eye. Right now, she is busy trying to reform the regulations of the fief. ...I wonder when she takes the time to rest, or rather, it's a question of whether or not she sleeps at all.

Her work ethics and the way she gives adequate instructions, just thinking of those leaves me astonished. For her sake, I do not mind overworking these old bones of mine. ...While supporting this person, it is a pleasure to see what the future will look like.

However, I do have one concern, the young mistress is looking more and

more haggard recently. Although the person herself said that it's because she's trying to lose weight... I'm worried that weight loss might not be the only reason... but fatigue as well.

There is no mistake that the future of our fief lies on the shoulders of the young mistress. And because of that, the presence of the young mistress is getting bigger day by day.

I must support the young mistress as much as I can so that she doesn't collapse.

Today as well, I will ask the chef to prepare the young mistress' favorite food. ...That's what I was thinking on the way home from the Commerce Guild.

# Chapter 16: Aesthetics are Universal

...By the way, it's been half a year since the bank was established. During this half a year, the Public Works' first project, road maintenance, began and is progressing steadily.

As for the bank, different conglomerates opened an account under the names of their conglomerates and made deposits. And those people part of the conglomerates opened an individual account and it began to spread... Now, the presence of the bank has become larger in urban areas. Because of this, Moneda looked really busy. The challenge right now is... probably how to spread this to other cities.

Also, capital for the educational institution has been gathered safely and is now under construction. When it is completed, it will immediately be open for operation. However, since the construction of the advanced division is the priority, it will still be a long way to go before all the children of the fief will be able to attend the primary division.

My workload has not decreased at all, or rather, it has increased. Indeed, because the workload has increased recently to the point of being in a risk of overworking, there was an urgent need to gather officials to help with managing the fief. Because there are already some people in the house who had been helping with the fief, I immediately engaged them for work for us.

The departments are as follows: Finance, Education, Public Affairs, Public Works, and Judicial Affairs. Moreover, it is a system where I, as the representative of the Fief Lord, is at the top.

By the way, the Finance department is concurrently working on the taxation. Each department is to calculate their expenses and submit a report in a form of a balance sheet. From there, the bank will take a look at it and give the approval needed. Again, this is being done to prepare of the taxation reform in the future.

The Education department operates in a similar manner to the Ministry of Education in Japan. The academy personnel will decide on what

subjects they want to teach, but the Education Department reserve the rights to choose the contents and how much funds will be spent.

The Public Affairs department are in charge of managing the people of the fief. As of now, they are busy running about in preparation to make family registers. ...I was also thinking of eventually establishing Social Welfare.

The Public Works is currently in charge of the road construction, and eventually, they will also be responsible for building public facilities. In other words, because the road maintenance is underway, it is not an exaggeration to say that they are very busy.

As for the Judicial Affairs, just as its name suggests, they are in charge of implementing the laws in the fief. They are currently in charge of enforcing the current laws, and will be working on law reforms later on.

Now, since I'm tired, I should go take a hot bath.

"Young mistress, is there something the matter?"

"It's rare that I have some free time, and since I'm tired, I thought to take a hot bath. Can you prepare it?"

When I asked Tanya to prepare one, Tanya immediately left to take care of it. Tanya has been overprotective lately. ...I wonder if I really do look all that tired?

"...Today, young mistress somehow looks really happy, is something happened?"

"Ah, as I thought, you can tell? Fufufu, the thing I really wanted had arrived."

Fufufu... After being busy for half a year researching and researching, it has finally been completed. And today, I am intending to test it out.

I slowly got into the bath, and when I felt that my fatigue has been healed, I immediately used it. Haaa~ The aroma of rose smells really good.

When I got up from the hot bath in high spirits, Tanya was outside preparing my outfit.

“Please excuse me, I’m coming in, young mistress. I finished the preparations... E-eh!”

When Tanya looked at my hair, a surprised expression appeared on her face. Fufufu, it’s wonderful, isn’t it? Since she’s the kind of person who usually doesn’t have much of an expression, the effect is excellent.

“Young mistress’ hair looks really beautiful... It is as though it’s shining. Please excuse me, young mistress. Exactly how in the world did it turn out like this...”

“Fufufu... It’s because I used this.”

What I took out was a small bottle. And inside it was a pale yellow liquid.

“This is, what exactly is it?”

“It’s called a “Rinse.” It is a necessary item needed to regulate your hair and make it glossy.”

In fact, Rinse doesn’t exist in this world. It seems like everyone washes their hair with soap and water. I have endured this for the last half a year. Incidentally, I couldn’t get my head around it for the first three months and thus I didn’t notice. After noticing, it’s human nature to worry about it. ...When one only uses shampoo, hair will get damaged. Because I know that, I can’t end it with just using shampoo. Because Iris has beautiful platinum hair which she inherited from her mother, it gave me unnecessary stress.

And thus, I tried making handmade soap, shampoo and rinse similar to the ones in my previous life. Although lotion does exist in this world, it still took quite a bit of time.

Since I’ll be making them anyway... I might as well make related products. I used the roses our House is proud of as the fragrance.

“...Young mistress, it’s amazing...”

Tanya muttered while looking at my hair. As I thought, no matter which world it is, everyone will be interested in beauty products.

“...Shall I give some to Tanya as well?”

“Eh, will that be alright with you?”

“I can immediately make more.”

Although it took a lot of time to make one, but since I now have the recipe, it won't take long to make more.

“Then, please give me a little...”

Tanya gladly received it. It brings me great pleasure to know she's happy. Because I've been indebted to Tanya for a while now.

However, the talk didn't end there. When the female employees saw my hair, they wondered whether I was using something special and where they could get their hands on it, and approached Tanya one after another. Although Tanya kept quiet about it, I unceremoniously reveal the nature of Rinse, and they asked for it one after another.

When the male staff found out about the effect, they thought, “This will definitely sell,” and wrote up the proposal. Thus, it was immediately promoted and commercialized by the Azura Conglomerate.

As a result, it is needless to say that my workload has increased even further.

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### Translator's Message

What Iris refers to as Rinse, we are more familiar with the term “conditioner.”

# Chapter 17: Mother, is a Cheat

Before the product was commercialized, I sent trial products to mother who seemed to really like them and began advertising the products here and there. And the result is, of course, it has established itself as a popular item amongst the aristocrats and even the commoners in spite of its high price. ...Really, mother is skillful when it comes to advertising. And I have secretly given the position of Advertising Director to mother.

As a matter of course, since the conglomerate has expanded, my workload naturally increases. Even though the number of employees have increased gradually and have been given as many supervisory responsibilities as possible, but because it hasn't been a year since we started our operation, it can't be helped that I still want to be directly engaged in it. ...But I have to take care of my health.

“...Young mistress Iris.”

“Oh, Sebastian. What's wrong? If I'm not mistaken, the discussion with you will take place in the afternoon?”

“About that, there has been information that the Madam will be arriving in the afternoon...”

“Eh? Mother is? But she did not write a word of it in her previous letter...”

“In any case, please instructs us.”

“Y-you're right. For the time being, please ask the people in the dining room to proceed to the door, and also tidy up mother's room. Even though it is usually kept clean, please double check it.

Please also change the flower display by the entrance hall. Let's change it to the same rose we use for the product. After that, since I want to serve the new product, chocolate fondant for dessert, please prepare a menu to accommodate it. Because chocolate fondant is quite rich, it will be better to serve a slightly light meal.”

“As you wish.”

“As for the tea, please serve the herbal tea. Because this will be served in Azura Conglomerate’s coffee shop franchise, I want to get some impressions.”

By the way, teahouse the name of the new division. I thought it wouldn’t be a good idea to keep calling them “Noble line” and “Commoner line,” and thus the establishment of a cafe where nobles and the wealthy can come to visit.

Therefore, the chocolate products have been divided into teahouse division and confectionery division.

Ah, however, I left the noble line as it is, you know? Since the nobles love to receive special treatment. When we established a membership system, and everyone was delighted and rushed to apply for memberships.

If they are qualified to become members, they can visit an exclusive shop in the Royal City and the fief. It is a place where they can watch the mechanics of our conglomerate and how we handle “all” our products.

In other words, it’s not limited to just confectionaries, but also the recently established beauty products. In the case of the beauty products, the herbal body perfume created with various different aromas are currently selling like hotcakes.

The orders for the confectionery is also doing well, and there’s a different booth in the teahouse where people can buy food and eat them on the spot.

...More importantly, since mother will be coming, I need to clear out some time off my schedule. I immediately looked at my schedule to verify. Recently, Tanya has been acting as my secretary. I’m really grateful to her.

And so, I somehow managed to clear some time off my schedule and wait for mother’s arrival. When I meet everyone... I’ll apologize to them. I feel really apologetic that everyone’s burden has increased greatly, so before the information that mother has arrived, I will do some office work. Just with confirmation of numbers.

“The Madam has arrived.”



“Thank you, Sebastian.”

I headed to the entrance hall at once. Oh, the corridor looks shinier than usual.

“Welcome home, Madam.”

The employees greeted mother upon her return.

“Welcome home, mother.”

The person who emerged from the door is a matchless beautiful woman with platinum hair. Ah, although she’s my own mother, I really do think she’s beautiful...

Mother, who used to be called “The Flower of High Society,” is still an existence admired by aristocrats and she carries a great deal of influence in social circles. ...In addition, she is the Advertising Director of Azura Conglomerate, even though this information is not public.

“I have returned~ I’m sorry for coming so suddenly, Iris-chan.”

She has a gentle character. Although she talks like this to family members, it’s entirely different outside. How should I say this... Because she is called the “Flower of High Society,” of course, she acts like a perfect lady.

“No, not all. I am glad to be able to see mother after such a long time.”

“Oh my, you sure said something cute. Nevertheless, because I wasn’t able to properly talk to Iris-chan before you came here, I feel really happy.”

“However, is this really fine? I mean, it is still the season if I’m not mistaken?”

“It is all good~ The official events have all ended, and I have informed all of the people I have good relations with... Ah, although I received an invitation from the wife of the Leader of the Knight Order, I didn’t feel like going.”

...As expected of mother... Although that was what I was thinking, I didn’t say it out loud. By now, I’m sure that the people from the household

of the Knight Order Leader have turned ghastly pale... Or rather, that's what I think.

After all, if mother doesn't attend, it holds a meaning that the event will likely not be entertaining.

It can't be to that extent, right? Might be what some people are thinking, but this is indeed the truth.

Except for official functions, entertainments held by individual households will change their status depending on "what kind of people can they gather." And so, when the person dubbed as the "Flower of High Society" doesn't attend, it holds a great meaning.

Even when mother does attend an event, the organizers will feel really worried because they might never know when mother feels like leaving. If mother leaves the event early, organizers will feel like there's no sense in continuing the event.

Whether if it's a tea party or a ball, the wife's ability will be tested... If it's not an official event, even during the entertainment of the royal family, the Queen's ability will be tested. As long as she attended, it will not be impolite.

Really, the existence of someone like mother, is in itself, is a cheat.

...Let's leave that aside. It was impolite of me to think that Dorsen deserves it. However, I do not feel all that sorry.

# Chapter 18: Mother seems really angry

“Well~ Iris-chan. You’re working already?”

Early in the morning while I was working in the study, mother unexpectedly came to visit.

“I’m sorry, mother. It’s probably time for breakfast.”

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it. Or rather, I’m more worried about Iris-chan’s physical condition.”

“I’m doing fine. I have not collapsed for the past half a year. In addition, I’m enjoying myself plenty.”

“Is that so? It’s fine if that’s the case...”

“If you’d like, please eat breakfast ahead of me. It seems like this will take a little more time. I asked them to prepare chocolate croissant for today’s breakfast.”

“Chocolate croissant? I’ve never heard of it before.”

“It’s a new product of Azura Conglomerate. It is a type of bread that has chocolate kneaded into it.”

“Oh my, that sounds delicious. However, since I have the chance, I’ll wait to eat together with Iris-chan.”

“I understand. I’ll work hard to finish this as soon as possible.”

Tanya immediately took the chance to serve mother some tea. A secretary who can do anything, that’s Tanya.

Since earlier this morning, I have been looking at one report after another from the various different departments. Ahh... there’s still a long way to go.

The road construction is doing well, and the construction of the educational institution in the fief’s capital is also steadily progressing.

“Sebastian, the calculation is wrong, please fix it. Also, this estimated budget is rejected. The calculation of the expenses is too generous. Please

cut down on places where expenses can be reduced. If Public Works department is not satisfied with this budget, tell them to gather the evidence needed and bring them to me. Ah, speaking of Public Works, about that matter, how did that turnout?”

“Yes. The road maintenance and the preparations to construct the public office building are advancing smoothly. Since the materials used on both can be transported at the same time, I was thinking of cutting the cost there...”

“I would like to know more about that situation, so please submit a report to me by all means. Also, please inform the Public Affairs department that preparing the family registers is the first priority. At the very least, I want the people living in the fief’s capital to have theirs done before the end of the road maintenance. In the future, this will be an important document. Please tell them that before progressing to something else, speed up the creation of the family registers.”

“I understand.”

I looked at these documents earlier, so I guess this can be considered as done? As for these, I’ll look at them later and some discussions are needed... Uwa, there’s still two mountains left.

While I was thinking about it and sorting out the documents, a knock came from the door.

“Please enter.”

“Please excuse me.”

The person who entered was Sei, who is in charge of the conglomerate.

“Good morning Madam, Iris-sama. ...I was planning to give a report regarding Azura Conglomerate this morning but...”

“I will take a look at it, please hand it over.”

When the documents were placed on the desk, there was another mountain. Whether it’s too many or too little, I hesitate on passing judgment. And so, I lightly flipped through the documents. I used sticky

notes to tag segments that looked important and continued reading. After I finished reading everything, I went back to those stickied segments. ...I'm really pleased I am able to speed-read.

"...Overall, every division is in good condition. Regarding the new commodity for the beauty line products, please bring a sample later. Not just what's inside, but the container as well. After that, I would like some raw materials to conduct some tests... Please convey that to the developers."

"Something you'd like to try out, is it? If you can tell me ahead of time, I will make preparations."

"Is that so? If that's the case... Please bring the materials written in this memo this afternoon. In addition, please bring the account books from each store, I would like to confirm them. I will look at them later."

"I understand."

...I guess it'll be fine to end the morning meeting here.

"Mother, I'm sorry to keep you waiting."

"It's fine. Even so, this thing called "herbal tea" is really delicious."

Mother praised the tea while smiling. Even though I have kept her waiting for a while, mother is really gentle.

"I am very pleased that you like it. It is currently one of Azura Conglomerate's cafe franchise's popular item."

"That is so. By all means, I would also like to drink it even at home."

"Although that was the plan... we are currently in the condition where we can barely provide for the cafe."

Tea is a mainstream in this world, and when decided to serve them in the cafe experimentally, it became a big hit. Although a lot of people have requested to purchase the tea leaves, but the reality is that the production has not yet caught up. ...Some measures are needed to be done about this. Incidentally, there will be a meeting regarding the cafe in the afternoon.

"Is that so. When it becomes available for purchase, please immediately

let me know. I will serve it at the next tea party.”

“Then, I thank you in advance when the time comes.”

As expected of the Advertising Director. Even if I don’t ask her to, she is more than willing to work.

After that, I slowly ate breakfast with mother and had tea with her. It’s been a long time since I was able to spend a calming moment.

“...Which reminds me, how is the state of the house over there?”

“Hmm? Things are as usual~ Nothing ever changes~ Even though it’s long vacation, that foolish son of mine did not return home. He’s probably following the Second Prince and that woman most of the time.”

Mother’s voice turned cold halfway through her sentence. When my beautiful mother said those words with such force, it is a full mark.

“Mo-mother...”

“Though I have yet to say this, regarding the incident, I am, of course, your ally. Regarding Berne... I am angry at him.”

He-her tone has completely changed~!! It is completely out of my expectations. Because of her tone of voice was accompanied by a cold smile, cold sweat started trickling down my back.

“...To be honest, if he wasn’t my own son, I would have immediately crushed him.”

Although there was a smile on her lips, mother, it’s very scary.

“...Come to think of it, mother. What is the state of the castle in the Royal City?”

When I changed the topic of the conversation, mother “fuuu” let out a sigh and the atmosphere around mother turned gentle again.

Because of that, I felt relieved and also blew out a sigh. I-it’s not as though I was frightened by the atmosphere around mother that I changed the topic, okay? It is something I’m worried about.

...Of course, I have an understanding regarding both factions to some

extent. However, the information that mother has brought with her is extensive.

By the way, from what I understand regarding the First Prince's faction and the Second Prince's faction is that they are currently in a stalemate. I guess that's only natural. The present King is still in good health, so it is not wise to make a big move.

One of the main people involved... the First Prince is said to be studying abroad, which is very doubtful. In addition, where he has gone to was not made public. Because he has not appeared in the limelight, there's no news about him at all.

Although the Second Prince seems to be still living a life as a student in the academy, but I do not have more information because I didn't look into his school life.

# Chapter 19: Idle Talk

My name is Sei. I have no surname. Originally lived in the slums but after the young mistress picked me up, I started working for the House of the Duke of Armelia.

I was working under Sebastian-san as an apprentice butler for the House of the Duke, however, that is a story of the past.

The whole affair started when the young mistress became the proxy of the fief Lord. The young mistress launched a conglomerate, and at the same time, she put me in charge of that conglomerate. I wonder where my work as a butler has disappeared to ever since then... I became the young mistress' hands and feet, met with other people in charge every single day, corresponding to the customers... There was a mountain load of things to be done. Even right now, I am going to send a message via carrier pigeon to convey the young mistress' instructions.

“Oh, my, Sei-san. Thank you for your hard work.”

“Thank you for your hard work, Tanya-san.”

Coincidentally, Tanya-san and I passed by each other. She, as well, is working as the young mistress' hands and feet.

“How has it been as of late?”

“It's the same as always. What about Tanya-san?”

“On my side as well, it's the same as always. Now that you mentioned it, how's the schedule today?”

“After taking a short break, I was planning on heading to where the young mistress is.”

“If that's the case, would you like to have some tea?”

After receiving a rare invitation from Tanya-san, we headed to the employee's break room.

“Please go ahead.”

After sitting down on the chair, Tanya-san served me a cup of tea. The



drink was pale greenish yellow in color, a commodity the conglomerate has recently spent efforts to make, the herbal tea.

“This is the Rosemary flavor herbal tea. It’s good to drink when you’re tired.”

“Thank you very much. ...I shall partake it.”

After drinking a mouthful, I breathed out slowly.

“It’s delicious. ...Do I appear to look that tired?”

“No. However, you are tired, aren’t you?”

“Hahaha... Well, you are right. However, I’m still good to go. When I compare myself to the young mistress...”

“I am also getting worried about her. For a while now, I haven’t seen the young mistress taking any breaks at all.”

“You’re right, that’s how it’s been. Whenever I see her like that, I think that I have to work harder.”

My work has certainly increased when the young mistress came back. However, I never thought of it as unpleasant. Or rather, to be able to see how much will the conglomerate grow... It is my pleasure to be a part of it.

Above all, when I see that the young mistress’ workload is more than twice as much compared to mine, I feel that it’s natural for me to work harder.

“You shouldn’t be basing your standards on the young mistress. Because that person is addicted to it.”

“Hahaha, you said something really fitting... Ah, I should get going soon.”

“Right now, the young mistress is having a talk with the Madam. Because of that, she’s probably not done straightening things out...”

“Is that so. Then, perhaps I should go a little later. ...At any rate, for the Madam to make a trip all the way here, she is probably worried about the young mistress...”

“That’s probably how it is. Since from time to time, Yair-san will send a report to the mansion.”

Yair-san is the second butler of the Ducal House. However, since Sebastian-san is now devoted to the fief’s management, he is doing the work of the first butler.

“I completely understand that what the young mistress wants to accomplish is very important. However, compared to the fief, the young mistress is more important to me. I think this is a good opportunity for the young mistress to take a break even if it’s just a little...”

To Tanya, the young mistress is her life savior. Out of all of us, Tanya has the strongest feelings for the young mistress. If the young mistress were to ask her to offer her life, she would gladly do it.

“That’s right. ...Ah, Tanya-san. Could you give me another cup of this tea?”

“With pleasure.”

Let’s relax a little more before going. Let’s not disturb the young mistress’ rare moment of rest.

“...Oh, it’s been a long time. For two people to actually gather in this place.”

“Dida-san. It’s been a long time.”

The person who unexpectedly showed his face was, Dida-san. Although his duty is to be the young mistress’ escort, since the young mistress’ return he has been traveling around the fief giving instructions in place of the young mistress. Thus, it’s been a long time since we’ve seen each other.

“Dida-san as well, would you like a drink?”

“That is the tea that’s been a hot topic lately, right? I’ll drink, I’ll drink.”

Tanya promptly poured a cup of tea for Dida-san. Although Dida looked at it curiously, at first, he laughed joyfully after drinking it.

“Ahh~ this is delicious. I like this more than the common tea. The young

mistress is amazing to be able to come up with these things one after another.”

“Hahaha, certainly. By the way, what has Dida-san been doing recently?”

“Hmm? I went here and there with Ryle along with the newly trained guards to patrol the main roads.”

The young mistress wanted to strengthen the public order, and Ryle-san and Dida-san were put in charge of the training of the new recruits. Because the Duke’s guards are famous for being high quality, there are no other people fitting for that job.

In addition, Ryle-san and Dida-san had been solicited by the royal family to join the Royal Guards, but they chose to stay here. In other words, they are famous people.

“How is the public order?”

“It’s doing fairly well. The economy is doing well, too. But because that guy’s training is intense, a lot of the new recruits wanted to escape.”

“Hahaha, isn’t that a good thing? And so, what is it that you have to do today?”

“It’s because I got a summon from that guy. But I have no idea what for. ...Well, it’s been a long time since I’ve come back. So it’s probably alright if I act a little wild. Ah, Tanya. Please accompany me for training.”

“Please allow me to decline.”

As a matter of facts, Tanya-san is also versed in martial arts. When she was young, she seemed to have received severe training from Madam’s parents’ House. Even so, she wholeheartedly trained in order to be able to protect the young mistress.

“The majority of my attacks are one-hit kills. It’s a technique I polished to kill the opponent. Because my fundamentals are different from yours, I cannot act as your spar partner.”

“Hahaha, you’re one scary lady’s maid. However, for me to lose?”

“No, I did not say anything like that. What I mean is that our character

differs too greatly from each other.”

“Well, you’re right. I have no choice. I guess I have to settle on training with that guy.”

Dida-san drank the last mouthful of tea and stood up.

“Thanks for this. See you later.”

“Thank you for your hard work.”

“Thank you for your hard work... Now then, I’ll head to where the young mistress is. Because there’s still a lot of things that’s needed to be done, I must be going now.”

...I will also do my best. The young mistress, as well as everyone else, are doing their best with their respective work.

Although the work needed to be done were all jumbled inside my head, I returned to work feeling refreshed. As I thought, a break is important.

The young mistress as well has firmly taken a break. That’s what I thought.

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### Translator’s Message

This was written from Sei’s perspective. Sei-san ganbatte! Iris’ Kingdom of Fortune depends on you!

Also, Haikai has pointed out that this novel has reached over 1,000 readers in NU! Thank you for your support.

# Chapter 20: The Appearance of Grandfather

“...The state of the Royal City is the same as always~ However, the castle is slightly sensitive.”

“...Sensitive, you say?”

“That woman seems to be getting carried away and has recently done various unusual things~... Although that Baron’s daughter is most probably trying to gain influence. When Sharia died, the King has become severely weak-minded. ...That’s why at that time, Arya-sama and I were opposed to him getting married to that woman.”

“That woman” she speaks of is the King’s concubine, Ellia-sama. Mother seems to dislike Ellia-sama since the olden days. On the contrary, she seemed to have gotten along really well with Sharia-sama.

Also, Arya-sama is the present King’s mother... In other words, the Queen Dowager. She has the highest position amongst the women in this world. She is now retired and is living in the dowager palace. However, that does not mean that her influence has decreased.

By the way, it seems like Arya-sama has loved mother since a very, very long time ago. Arya-sama will not hesitate to say that mother is like her real daughter. Even though Arya-sama is now retired, mother will still sometimes visit the dowager palace.

“...Although I heard about the Baron’s daughter trying to gain influence... But I thought that Ellia-sama will definitely oppose to Yuri-sama and Ed-sama’s engagement...”

When one thinks about the future, instead of a daughter of a Baron... I thought that Ellia-sama would choose to engage Ed-sama to a more powerful House.

“About that Baron’s daughter... What was her name again?”

“Her name is Yuri Noir-sama.”

“Ah, that’s right. About Yuri-sama... She’s admirably skillful. In flattering other people’s pride, that is. Since that’s the case, it is inevitable that the vain Ellia will succumb.”

“...Mother, have you ever met Yuri-sama?”

“Yes. Right now, since she seems to be appearing here and there, I met her by chance~ As soon as Iris-chan was gone, she has been accompanying the Second prince.”

“Is that so... How did your encounter with her turn out?”

“It’s neither here nor there since I’m Iris-chan’s ally after all~ ...However, even if I wasn’t, she’s not someone I want to get acquainted with. I’m no good with those kinds of people whom I cannot see their true self.”

“You’re saying she’s too dream-like?”

“Unn... I can’t really explain it~ However, Iris-chan is fine since you don’t have to approach her.”

It doesn’t look like mother will speak any further... This worries me. Truthfully, since I didn’t have much contact with her, I don’t understand her well. Though I’m quite familiar with Ed-sama’s personality.

“Th-then... Mother. What kind of person is the First Prince?”

“Oh my, has Iris-chan never met him before?”

“Yes...”

I don’t have any memory of it at all. If I have met him, since he’s part of the royal family... I thought that I have would properly remember him.

“Now that you mentioned it, Alfred-sama retired from the limelight fairly early... And then he immediately went abroad to study.”

“Why did he draw away from the limelight so early?”

Since he was considering on studying abroad, he didn’t have to remove himself from center stage.

“When Sharia died, a lot of things happened... However, it wasn’t like it was his fault? After all, he is an amazing person just like my husband.”

“Just like father, is it?”

“Yes. Ah, I’m not saying he looks similar. But the atmosphere around him is similar. As long as he stays in this country, you might meet him someday.”

“Is that so, as long as he stays in this country... Ee-ehh?”

Didn’t he leave to study abroad?! Or rather, how did mother know about this information?

“Oh my, you didn’t know about it...? Then, this is a secret.”

No, no, no... It’s not that kind of a problem that will be settled by keeping it a secret.

“Why in the world is he not showing himself...”



“It’s been a long time~!! Melly, Iris!!”

While I was in the middle of asking my question, the door opened vigorously and my grandfather appeared. ...What, Eh?

“Grandfather! Why are you here...”

“I heard that Melly came here. I thought it was perfect timing and came here.”



Gazelle Daz Anderson. He is mother's father, currently serving the Kingdom as its general, and my grandfather.

Anderson House is a Marquis House, however, grandfather said that the world of the aristocrats is too laborious and enlisted in the military. He was remarkably able to make a name for himself. In the thirty-year war campaign against the neighboring Kingdom, Towair, he was appointed General and achieved huge success. Even until now, he is an existence respected by the Knights and other members of the military.

To explain the difference between the Knight Order and the Royal Guards, the Knight Order are armed forces while the Royal Guards are in charge of protecting the castle. The people who belong to that group are people who received an aristocrat's recommendation.

And within the group of the royal guards, there's another unit in charge of protecting the royal family called, Personal Guards. Because the mission of Personal Guards is to become the spear and shield of the King in case something happens, only Knights who are stronger than average are appointed.

Although Ryle and Dida were recruited to become Personal Guards... It was because their strength was forged by grandfather. As for recommendation, they probably got one from father, or even grandfather. ...In the end, both people refused.

The army is a group of people who will immediately advance to the battlefield when a war occurs. When one wants to enlist in the army, they will not be questioned of their background. During peacetime, instead of being in a garrison, their work consists of maintaining peace in the Royal City and across the Kingdom.

After explaining up until this point, it should give one a basic understanding that grandfather who was the only son of a Marquis, should have enlisted as a Royal Guard. However, grandfather enlisted to be part of the armed forces.

Well, if one looks at his appearance, his unruly gray hair, his disorderly beard, and his burly physique, one can only think of him as a Warrior and

not a Marquis that he is.

By the way, Melly is my mother's nickname. Her full name is Mellice Reese Armelia.

"Iris, you've had it hard... I'm sorry for not showing up sooner."

"Not at all! Grandfather has been busy with a lot of things. I don't mind it at all."

"Hahaha, I have already let my son succeed me as head, and even if war is to occur, it's not like the Kingdom will immediately fall. I have free time."

...But if I'm not mistaken, grandfather. I heard that grandfather has been looking for people to train every day...

"Still, Iris is looking more and more like Melly..."

While saying that, grandfather looked at me while smiling.

"I-I wonder if that really the case..."

To say that I look like mother, it is unthinkable. ...It's probably just him showing love for his grandchild.

My platinum hair is the only thing I have that resembles mother. If we compare our eyes, mine is an intense dark blue whereas mother has soft blue eyes with the color of aquamarine, reminding me of the color of the blue sky in spring.

"There's no need for you to rush into marriage. It's alright for you to continue doing the things you want to do. If you lose your place here, it's fine for you to come to mine."

...That's right. That might be good as well. When the time comes for brother to inherit the Dukedom, I'll lose my place here. When that happens, I'll be fine for me to go to grandfather's place... Since it's possible to give instructions for Azura Conglomerate from anywhere.

"Oh my, father. I cannot let that comment pass. There is no way that there will come a day when Iris-chan loses her place. If anything, please take my foolish son away by all means."

## Translator's Message

The First Prince didn't study abroad and is still in the Kingdom?!  
SHOCK!

And it looks like Iris' mother is really enraged with Berne... Berne, you need to apologize! Or else you'll be killed by your own mother (or the readers, hahaha)!

# Chapter 21: A Promise with Grandfather

“About this, it’s not possible for me to take Berne away. Louis-dono will be troubled.”

“Well... It’s not like my husband will be particularly against it?”

“Hmm... Well, I guess that’s true...”

I felt like my head was splitting trying to follow the conversation of these two people. That child is suffering from blindness as usual.

“That child, has he done a lot inappropriate of things there?”

“He is moving splendidly. For Edward-sama’s sake, that is. No... It is for the sake of the Baron’s daughter...”

...Ahh, it’s scary to think what will happen after this, I don’t want to listen any further. Or rather, he doesn’t seem like he wants to come back to the Duke’s House.

“Putting that aside, Iris. Will it be all right for me to stay here for a while?”

“Of course, grandfather. Ah, if that’s the case... there’s something I’d like to trouble you with...”

“What is it?”

“There are two things... The first one is, our fief has newly established a security patrol unit. I would like to ask you to train those new recruits. Of course, only when grandfather is staying here.”

“Of course, it is fine with me. It’s just right since I was intending to mess around with Ryle and Dida.”

“Eh? Then those two people knew that grandfather was coming here?”

“I did tell them about it a while ago... But since they are already accustomed to it, I expected this would happen.”

...Grandfather, you’re too laid-back. If that’s the case, there’s no need for me to inform those two. Since the duration is not yet decided.

“And so, what’s the other one?”

“Umm... about that...”

“Now, now, tell me.”

“...Would you please accompany me to town?”

Grandfather became wide-eyed, I wonder if my request was too unexpected.

“Although I don’t mind doing that... But what for?”

“Umm... I want to walk around town. It’s not that I want to inspect the town... However, I want to know what the state of the town is, how the people are acting and living now. I want to go to town to see and get a feel for it myself. Because of that, I do not want to take a lot of people with me... But if it’s grandfather, there won’t be any problems, right?”

During the previous inspection of the fief, I saw a lot of things. I want to walk around town not to inspect but as a regular person. Not riding a carriage, not surrounded by guards, but more directly. In other words, just like in the past. When I think about that, grandfather’s arrival is extremely convenient.

Number one, since I will be going with someone as strong as grandfather, it will be completely safe and Ryle and Dida will not oppose.

Number two, when I walk around grandfather, it will act as a camouflage. Although it’s rude of me to say this, grandfather doesn’t look like an aristocrat at all.

Number three, because there is a lot of things to be done in the house, I do not want trouble people with my selfish acts. In addition, Ryle and Dida has a lot of work allocated to them, and I want them to prioritize those... Although there are new recruits who could act as escorts, their abilities are still uncertain. When thinking about all of these reasons, grandfather’s arrival really is convenient.

“I don’t mind it at all? Then, shall we go tomorrow?”

“Is that true!? Thank you in advance.”

Wahh~ I wonder what I should do... What to buy, and window shopping as well. I'm looking forward to it.

At that exact moment, I heard a knock on the door.

"...Please excuse me. Iris-sama, it is time for the afternoon meeting..."

The person who entered shyly was Sei.

"Oh my, it's already that time...?"

"Iris-chan, you don't have to worry about us. Since we came here on our own will."

"That's right. It's about time for me to mess around with Ryle and Dida."

"Since that's the case, the both of you, I must be going so please excuse me. If something happens, please call for me."

On the way to the study, Sei reported the progress made since this morning's meeting. ...Ah, now that I think about it, we have yet to plan for the sale of the herbal tea leaves.

"By the way, Sei. Regarding the report about the Baron's daughter, Yuri..."

"Ah, about that girl. She wanted to apply to become a member, I dismissed her application."

"Oh my, Ed-sama didn't complain about it?"

"I said, 'it's a different situation if she becomes part of the royal family through marriage, but until then she cannot become a member.' 'In addition, our conglomerate has many aristocrats waiting to become a member and they have higher status than you.' When I gave that reason, she was convinced. Although the Second Prince wanted to say a lot of things, she persuaded the Second Prince not to in the end."

"Is that so... If it was handled well, then that's good."

"...Or rather, what is up with those people? They should clearly know that the Azura Conglomerate belongs to the young mistress, and yet for them to act so self-important, they sure have the nerve."

“...They probably don’t know, or rather, the correct answer is that they were never interested in me from the very beginning.”

Un, at least, it feels that way. To them, I have probably reached the level... where I am nothing but a memory, a person from the past. For them, unless it’s someone they consider important, no one else can enter their view... Ah, now that I think about it, the expression ‘Eye of the Storm’ is a fitting description.

“Even if those people don’t care about other people unrelated to them, it still leaves a bad taste in my mouth. Second Prince has been brandishing his influence that it’s not acceptable if we do not give that girl special treatment... It makes one want to retort, ‘Then what in the world are you doing applying for membership.’”

“...”

I unintentionally blew out a heavy sigh.

“Sei. If you’re doing this for my sake, you don’t have to worry about me and address the membership application as usual. Or rather, it will be troublesome if Ed-sama intervenes and do this and that.

“Right now, it really is because of the number of pending memberships. When it is time to look at her application, I will examine it very carefully.”

“It’s fine if it’s like that.”

After that, I continued making arrangements with Sei, but before I knew it, it was already dusk.

...After that was a meeting with Sebastian.

While I was thinking about it, I leisurely strolled alone. The compound of the Duke’s House is extremely large. Presently, other than the main building, there are a couple of gardens and a secondary residence. By the way, Azura Conglomerate is currently borrowing the second residence as its headquarters.

Because it was settled that prototype products cannot be made public, we decided to use that building. I also go there when I want to perform

trials. It turns out to be a good choice since it's also in the House's compound.

When I entered the study, Tanya immediately served tea.

"By the way, Tanya. Can you adjust the schedule for tomorrow?"

"Do you have something else planned?"

"Yes. Grandfather will be taking me out for a walk around town."

"Gazelle-sama will be taking you? If that's the case, then it's fine. I will immediately adjust the schedule to make time."

"Thank you."

With this, it's settled. I'm looking forward to tomorrow~

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### Translator's Message

While translating this chapter, I was sorely tempted to go out and buy pom-poms. Sei-sama suteki desuwa!



# Chapter 22: The Young Mistress goes to Town

Now then, it has finally arrived, the promised day with grandfather.

Today, I made preparations to eat breakfast quickly and immediately made arrangements. Since I'll be walking around town today, as I thought, it would not be appropriate to wear what I usually wear, so I decided to wear something a little more modest. ...Though I said that, I clothes I've been wearing recently emphasizes more on functionality, and because of that I don't feel like I think to change anything.

When I headed towards the entryway to wait for grandfather, for some reason, Tanya was there wearing a disguise.

"Tanya... I thought I told you that there's no need, what's with your appearance?"

"I will also be going with you."

"However, Tanya. I don't really want to take a lot of people with me during my walk."

"It won't matter much whether it's two or three people."

No, although that might be the case, but...

"Young mistress. Please value yourself more. Gazelle-sama's strength is indeed reliable. However, in case an emergency happens... it would be difficult for him to fight while guarding young mistress. Therefore, at the very least, please take me along."

"But..."

"Isn't it fine, Iris."

"Grandfather..."

"Tanya is also worried about you. It is also the duty of the master to take the feelings of those under her into consideration."

...Certainly, in an unlikely chance that something happens to me during

an emergency, it will really be troublesome. Especially when both the conglomerate and the fief is finally progressing little by little after so much effort. I cannot be too selfish.

“I understand. Then, grandfather. Tanya. Let’s head off. And also, the both of you, please call me Alice while we’re in town.”

After we left the house through the rear gate, we slowly walked down the road. Un, the weather is pleasant and it feels comfortable. The spring weather in our fief is neither too hot nor too cold, it’s just nice.

The nearer we go to the center of the town, more and more people we see. There were light brown buildings forming a line, giving a different feeling from Japan. While walking energetically down the main street, I looked at shops here and there. Now that I think about it, this is the meaning of window shopping...

“Waa, it’s so cute. Auntie. This flower, what kind of flower is this?”

Something suddenly caught my eye, and I stopped at the front of the store. It was a lovely flower with purple petals.

“It’s a flower called Ajuga (bugleweed). It’s a flower that blooms at this time. It is a flower that is comparatively easy to raise.”

“Heh~ ...How much is this one?”

“If you want one that’s already in bloom, it’s 1,000 Bells. If you want the seeds, it’s 500 Bells for one bag.”

“Then, please give me a bag of seeds.”

“You got it. Thank you.”

After I paid the money, I received the bag. As I thought, it’s fun to shop for myself.

“About those, what would you do with them?”

“I thought of raising them by the window of the study. Don’t you think that that room feels a little gloomy?”

“Hahaha... As I thought, it is good for a woman to pay attention to

details.”

After walking for a while, we felt a little hungry, so we walked slightly away from the main road and entered a restaurant. When we entered the store, I had a hunch that the store is quite popular considering that the place was almost full.

“Welcome to the store. Please sit at any vacant seats.”

We sat down on chairs made out of wood and looked at the menu on the wall. There were variations of meals.

“Then, I’ll choose the set with grilled meat.”

“Umm, I’ll take the set with stew and bread.”

“I would like the same thing, please.”

When the waitress left our table, I looked around the store again. People were going in and out nonstop, and the atmosphere is lively and pleasant.

“Yes, thank you for waiting~ This is the stew you ordered earlier. Young ladies, I have never seen your faces before.”

Someone different from the earlier waitress delivered our meals.

“We came from the Royal City. We have been really busy because of the move, so we haven’t had the time to come to town until now.”

“Is that so~ You guys came from the Royal City.”

“How is the state of this town?”

“Hmm? Right, it is a good fief that won’t lose to the Royal City~ Especially recently, with the changes that are occurring, our lives are getting better little by little.”

“I’m really glad.”

I became really happy when I heard the uncle’s impression. Because it tells me that the things I’ve been doing are not useless. Since sometimes, I get scared thinking about it. ...If what I’ve been doing is right or not. Of course, it’s not as though there’s a right or wrong answer... No, it’s because there is no right or wrong answer that I wanted to know. To be

told clearly that “it is correct.”

I put those thoughts aside and ate the delicious meal. As I thought, it's good to be like this once in a while~ ...It's difficult to be the same each day. It's not like I don't understand grandfather's feelings.

After eating a delicious meal, we left the shop and continued to walk around. I wonder if it's about time we headed home? While I was thinking that, I saw a tiny child squatting down, while another was looking around restlessly.

“What's wrong? Are you feeling unwell?”

Although the clothes they were wearing is clean, it looked worn out. And their body were thin overall.

“...I become a lost child.”

The girl who was looking around restlessly said while her tears were threatening to spill from her eyes.

“Oh my, that must be really hard on you. Did you get separated from your mother and father?”

“No. I live with teacher and the others.”

Since I don't know where the lost children lived, it'll be difficult to help... Now then, I'm stumped.

“Young mi-... Alice-sama. These children, could they possibly live at the institution?”

Earlier... Tanya, you almost wanted to call me ‘young mistress’ didn't you? ...Or rather, that aside, these children are more important.

“What do you mean by ‘institution?’”

“It is a facility somewhere in the downtown area that takes care of children who lost their parents.”

“Oh my, what a wonderful thing to do. For the time being, let's take these children there.”

Grandfather lifted the little girl who was sitting on the ground, as for the

one I was talking to, Tanya held onto her hand.

At first, my impression of the place was pleasant as we passed by the orderly row of buildings, but as time went on, the place gradually became slightly dirty.

Although I was wondering if this was the correct place, the eyes of the children began to sparkle. When a building that looks like a church came to view, the children started running towards it.

In front of the building, there was a woman who was looking around anxiously for the children. When she saw the children, her eyes momentarily turned wide in surprise... looking like she was about to burst into tears.

“Really...! I was seriously worried about you two... Where in the world did you guys go...!”

“We’re so sorry, Mina-sensei. When we went exploring, we got lost before we knew it.”

“Oh dear... In any case, I’m glad you guys were able to come back safely...”

The woman whom the children called ‘Mina-sensei’ hugged them tightly. ...It was good that I called out to them at that time.

“...Oh my, these people are...?”

When the woman finally noticed us, she looked at us in wonder. While I was wondering what I should say... the children were the ones who responded for me.

“They were the one who brought us here~”

“Oh my...! I am truly very sorry to have trouble you all.”

“No, it’s fine.”

“Although I cannot express my gratitude enough, maybe some tea...”

Although we refused the offer for tea, we decided to intrude when the children asked us to play together with them.

Albeit the inside was every bit a little old-fashioned as the exterior, and repairs seemed necessary here and there, the cleaning was done beautifully.

“Truly, thank you very much for today.”

“No... Or rather, I’m really sorry. Ah, although it’s a little late, I am called Alice.”

“I am called Mina. ...Alice-san, where did you find those children?”

“On the side of the main street. As for their actual location, it is in the neighborhood of Azura Conglomerate.”

“Ahh, as I thought...”

“What do you mean by ‘as I thought’...?”

“Nothing really, though I’m really ashamed to say this, I don’t know where the children heard it from, but they heard about the ‘chocolates’ that the Azura Conglomerate makes. They kept saying that they want to try it at least once.”

“Oh my... And so they went all the way there...”

“It’ because they are full of spirit. So the moment I took my eyes off them, they immediately fled somewhere.”

“By the way, why is Mina-san here taking care of all the children?”

“...To be honest, I am also one of the people who was brought up here. My adoptive parent was a Sister of the Darryl religion and managed this church. And then she picked me up, an orphan, and raised me here. After Sister died, I decided to stay here to succeed her.”

“...I see. Excuse me for asking this but, what do you do to earn money? Umm... with that many people to support, it must require quite a bit of money...”

“Previously, we used the contribution made to the church. However, when Sister died, the contribution has decreased tremendously...”

Un... Well, the present situation is not directly connected to the Darryl

region. At this moment, rather than saying the people do not want to contribute to the church, it is more likely that the people do not want to donate to the children. Having said that, it doesn't look like Mina-san is able to go outside to look for work...

Or more precisely, I should say that this problem is something I should tackle. When I return to the house, let's immediately talk to Sebastian.

"...Well..."

"I'm very sorry for talking about gloomy things. Please take your time and relax here. I will be making preparations for the evening meal."

No, no, no! We cannot be indebted any further than this! I was thinking of refusing her offer, but Mina-san left the place really quickly.

...Perhaps I should say that I've been really careless because I was busy playing with the children.

When I looked around, grandfather was playing with the children, and it looks like the children really like him. ...Grandfather, you're not going to give them training, are you?

And then, I saw Tanya teaching a girl how to braid hair. Unn, Tanya is unexpectedly good at handling children.

...By the way, while I was being troubled, the children started to gather around me one by one. There are both boys and girls around... I wonder what should I do. Although I do like children because they are really cute, but because I haven't played with them much, I don't really understand them.

Therefore, I decided to tell a fairy-tale story to the children. It is a fairy-tale story that everyone in Japan has heard of. Because the children's eyes were gradually getting brighter and brighter, as time goes by, I got more and more into it. Although I have never acted before, I did my best and performed.

...Oh, my? Before I was aware of it, almost all the children had gathered. When I first started, there were only three children, but now, it has increased to eight children. The two other children were with grandfather

and Tanya. Or rather, grandfather, where did that wooden sword come from...?

I pushed that thought aside for now and continued telling the story to the children. ...One way or another, the child holding the wooden sword looked really happy. Because it might be of some use to the child in the future, so let's just give that excuse and pretend I didn't see anything.

Now that I think about it, does this world not have a picture book? If it doesn't, let's immediately have Azura Conglomerate handle it. It will be good for the children's education, and it will also contribute some profit.

While I was thinking that, I suddenly heard a and loud angry voice coming from outside.

"I know that you're in there! Hurry up and come out here!!"

...Wh-what is it?

With a deep and rough voice, the man repeated his words over and over. Naturally, the children were afraid and huddled themselves. Finally, with a crashing sound, a stone was thrown.

"...Everyone! Are you okay?"

Mina-san, who heard the sound, rushed to where we were in a panick.

"Exactly what in the world is happening here?"

Tanya asked. Although she's expressionless as usual, I felt that she was a little angry.

"...In fact, although I'm ashamed to say this, but we've been demanded to evict..."

"Why is that?"

"Sister is gone and the Darryl religion has washed their hands off of this place, so a successor won't be coming. Therefore, that gentleman seemed to have bought this land. However, if we were to leave this place, we will have nowhere else to go..."

And because of that, it has become a dispute. Unn... Although I'm not



praising the gentleman outside, he does have justifiable claims. And because his place is relatively close to the main street, the location is pretty good...

For the time being, because the angry voice seems to be getting louder, I went outside.

While I was walking out, I heard Tanya saying 'Please stop it,' but it's not like I can do that either. If Tanya were to go out there, it will be futile because she'll probably be overwhelmed, and if it's grandfather, the person will get intimidated.

"Ha? Who the hell are you..."

Two grim looking men appeared to be suspicious because of my arrival.

"I am a person who came to this place to worship. ...Apparently, a mass hasn't been conducted for a long time now. However, this place is still a church of the Darryl religion. To throw a stone into this place, I can't say that I'm in admiration."

"Ha? This is a place that has been bought out by our employer."

"If that's the case, then this place no longer belongs to the Darryl religion."

"That's right. Nevertheless, there are still brats living in this place, so we are here to drive them out."

"Is that so. ...However, to throw a stone inside a church, as a believer, it's a barbarous act in which I cannot forgive. Thus, in order to prove that your claim is legitimate, please present the deed to the land awarded by the government office. And then proper measures will be taken. To use violence against feeble people, it is an outrageous act."

"Shut up!"

"If you continue to make a racket, the guards will be called."

"...In the first place, it's the children who are at fault because they don't want to come out."

Another man showed up from behind the two people. The man who just

appeared must be the employer they spoke of because the men seemed to obey this man. And because the man was wearing clothes a little too elegant for this place... He is their employer, that much I understand.

“I will agree with that fact. That said, however, it is still not proper to resort to violence. If you indeed have legitimate claims, please tell the government office.”

“Hmph. I will let bygones be bygones if those people who are living inside illegally pay the rent fee. Moreover, why would I trouble the government when all is needed is for the people to move out.”

When he said that, I indeed agree. Well... However, it cannot be helped if one is suddenly to tell them to leave this place. To make matters worse, what is a rent fee.

“...Or rather, are you saying that you are the substitute for the rent fee?”

“...Huh?”

No, no, what is he saying? He’s not asking if “I will be paying the rent fee” but rather, “I will be the payment for the rent fee?” In other words, he intends to sell me?

“Please allow me to refuse. ...Or rather, what are you talking about. With that negotiation.”

“I will probably receive a good price for you. No, it will be a waste to sell you immediately...”

“That’s why, I said that I refused.”

“Ha. You will be protecting those kids, isn’t that a good thing? The brats’ rent will be wiped clean, and you’ll be able to wear beautiful clothes and eat delicious food. And I will receive income. Alright, you guys. I will take this fellow.”

# Chapter 23: The Harvest in Town

The moment one of the men reached for me, Tanya appeared to protect me. In my eyes, everything happened as though it was in slow-motion.

“...Do not approach any further.”

Before I knew it, there was a knife in Tanya’s hands, I wonder when she took it out. That knife was pointed at the man’s throat. It remained pointed at a part of the man’s neck until a drop of blood came dripping down.

“Wh-who the hell are you...”

Because of the unexpected and sudden state of affairs, the men seemed somewhat surprised. However, it looked like they recovered before long, and the employer started laughing through his nose.

“Oh my, didn’t you say that it’s unpleasant to resort to violence, but aren’t you guys resorting to violence now?”

“It’s because of the attitudes you’ve displayed. Violence will be met with violence. That’s all there is to it.”

No, in reality, that’s not what I thought at all... In short, it was an excuse I immediately came up with. Tanya, you couldn’t endure it any longer, huh. However, because of you, I was saved. You have my gratitude.

Now then, what should I do now. If I were to reveal my social status here, it’ll be easy to solve this matter. However, I wanted the security forces to capture them if possible. It will be an advantage to show their capacity for the sake of maintenance and public order.

I would like for them to appear so that nothing will hinder them from their job if the same thing happens to other people in the future. In addition, it will enforce the idea that the security forces of our House are there to protect the citizens.

“Are you okay~?”

With an exquisite timing, grandfather appeared. A new person...

Moreover, with grandfather's appearance, he seems to be a person with ample strength, and the mood of the men gradually became resigned.

"...Tsk. Let's go."

When the employer finally made a decision, the two other men went away with him.

"...Young mistress!! Why did you do such a dangerous thing!"

"Oh my, oh my, Tanya. You're not supposed to call me young mistress."

"This is not the time to say such things! My insides turned cold. Even if Gazelle-sama wouldn't make an appearance, I could have gone out instead..."

"But you were angry even before I went out here, weren't you?"

"It's because young mistress was in a perilous situation. It's only natural."

"With such anger... you wouldn't have been able to talk calmly. If someone intimidating like grandfather went out, it doesn't look like any talking will be done... Because of that, I thought that the most qualified person to go out would be me."

"...Nevertheless..."

"In the first place, my main purpose was to be an advocate. The children in this place are also citizens whom I should protect. Since that's the case, I do not mind moving."

When I obstinately said that, although Tanya wasn't completely convinced, she finally became silent.

"About what happened here, I'll add it on my agenda when we get back. Not because it's personal, but because it's some that must be done for the fief. ...Now then, it is time we head back."

After that, the children who were shivering in fear regained their spirits and gave their appreciation, we said our farewells and began to walk back.

"...Alice."

Not far away from the main street, grandfather suddenly called my name.

“Is there some the matter, grandfather?”

“Run. ...Tanya, you understand, don’t you.”

“Of course.”

Tanya, who didn’t say anything else after that, grabbed my hand and started to move.

“Wai– Tanya!!”

“Alice-sama, please don’t talk and start running.”

Tanya led me towards the exit of the main street, where the branch of the security forces was.

“Please help us!”

I, who does not understand the situation well, and with a question mark flying above my head, I looked at Tanya with askance.

“What seems to be the problem?”

“Over there, we were attacked by some men... and then a person who coincidentally saw us, helped us out... But because he is outnumbered, I’m worried whether or not he’ll be fine...”

Tanya, who usually doesn’t have much expression, displayed a dreaded expression as though she was really afraid. ...Or rather, when you said the man was outnumbered, could it be grandfather...

“That’s very serious! We’ll go immediately.”

Three people from the security forces appeared and followed after us. ... Be that as it may, grandfather definitely looks a lot stronger even with the three of them combined... At least that’s what I think.

Tanya and I follow them. Tanya is necessary to act as their guide, however, I don’t separate from them because of the silent pressure I felt coming from my hand. ...I thought it would be absolutely safe for me to stay in the guardroom by myself.

And so, when we returned to the scene... there were about ten men on the ground. For an instant, I thought they were dead, but it seems like they just fainted.

As for grandfather, he was standing in the middle of the unconscious men looking really bored. ...Or rather, to be able to take care of this many people in such a short time... As expected of grandfather.

“Y-you are... Thank you for your hard work.”

A splendid salute. That reminds me, grandfather gave training to all the guards in the fief yesterday morning, so he probably recognizes grandfather's face.

“Mmn. Today, I was requested by one of my acquaintance to be these young ladies' guard. And then, though I don't really understand it, they suddenly attacked, so I did them in.”

I see... We are just another person until the end. Certainly, although grandfather's face is familiar to them, the fact that I am currently acting as the fief's lord proxy and the Duke's daughter is only known to the people part of the Azura Conglomerate Development Department and some of the fief's government.

“Please accept my gratitude for your cooperation. We will take over handling these people.”

“Well then, I guess I will leave now. As for the young ladies, I will be sending you.”

“Certainly.”

...From there onwards, we returned to the Duke's mansion without any other incident. By the way, the people who attack us, as I expected, they were people of that employer. It looks like he only left the place because he wanted to call his other companions. They were immediately apprehended with the charge of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is absolutely prohibited in our fief. This was not something I proposed, it has been a law in our fief since the olden days, so there's no need for deliberation.

In addition, Ryle and Dida got angry the moment I returned home. Grandfather just stay behind and laughed. ...However, I still intend to go out to town from time to time in the future. It was fun, and more importantly, I harvested a lot of things.

For one thing, the commerce for picture books was started. Afterward, it will be fairy-tale books for children. I will be giving it to the institution as a present. And the proceeds will be used to build a new institution. I decided that even in the future, the profits for the picture book will go to the institution.

...Of course, needless to say that my workload has increased. However, I felt a sense of fulfillment more than ever because I have determined my purpose.

The things I am doing has no right or wrong answer. ...However, I have the power. I can help and protect those small children. No, it is possible for me to help more people.

Since that's the case, all I have to do is believe and move forward. When I consider that, my hesitation was blown away and used my energy for work. ...Now then, I shall do my very best with work today.

# Chapter 24: Appearance of the Younger Brother

Now then, half a year has passed since that event. ...In other words, since I regained the memory of my previous life, almost two years has gone by.

The profit of Azura Conglomerate is the same as always, excellent. Although competitors have started to appear, in just one short year, I wondered if our conglomerate has gotten so big that it is now considered as a brand.

The reformation of the fief is happening little by little. The bank has become more widespread, and the road maintenance will be done soon.

The High School division of the educational institution has started its operation, and I heard that a lot of students had gathered. ...As for the Medical department, the local healers are also actively participating, while in the Accounting department, just as planned, the children of merchants came to learn double-entry bookkeeping and economic theory.

I heard that people have been enrolling to the Farming department little by little. After that, Primary School division was opened. Children from the institute are also attending, and when I went there to play the other day, they asked me to read some picture books.

By the way, the people who were arrested in that incident were sentenced to forced labor, so I used them without reservation. They were just arrested because taxes cannot afford to jail them.

As time progresses, a lot of various different things happened.

...That's right, time had passed by. Nevertheless, for some reason, mother and grandfather are still here in the mansion. No, it's all good and well, you know?

I mean, mother has really good sense, and she has given various advises and proposals to the development department of Azura Conglomerate, which really helps.



On the other hand, thanks to grandfather's training, the proficiency of our guards has increased. Although it's fine... It makes me think, 'are the both of you doing all right?'

Besides, the both of them have their own associates to socialize with, and they also have their own individual lives, right? While thinking of such things, it wasn't as though I can tell them to go home with those reasons, all things considered... Well, if the people involved are fine with this, then I'll just leave it alone.

...Like that, a certain incident occurred one day.

"Mother! Exactly what on earth are you doing?"

While I was having a pleasant tea time with mother in the garden, an intruder suddenly appeared. ...It was my younger brother, Berne. He hasn't changed one bit ever since the last time I saw him.

"...How boisterous. Please escort him out."

Mother didn't even take one look at Berne, she just treated him coldly. Ah, her tone of voice has changed... and cold sweat trickled down my back.

While the employees were urged by mother's intensity, they were also lost on what they should do because the other party was the heir. Among them, only Tanya began to move to carry out mother's order.

However, before she was able to approach him, he looked at our direction angrily and asked.

"Don't dodge the question, please tell me the reason."

"If you're asking for the reason, I have already written it in the letter. Because I am currently in poor physical condition, I will be resting in the fief and will not be attending."

"Hmph... You're having a cup of tea as usual, so who exactly is in poor physical condition? In addition, it was an invitation from the royal family... did you want to plunge MY Ducal House into a predicament?"



Surely, right now... Berne thinks that he has complete predominance over mother... and has a triumphant expression. But how regrettable. Mother is not someone who will stand for being talked to that way. My evidence appeared when mother put her cup down and gave Berne an icy glare.

“...You talk too much. YOUR Ducal House? What a thing to say for someone who has yet to inherit the title.”

It was a strong and intense punch. Nevertheless, it was a sound argument. Berne probably never expected her to say something like that... and in an instant, his expression broke.

“...As the person who will be succeeding it sooner or later, and my statement earlier was said in consideration of the Ducal House.”

“Silence. In consideration of the Ducal House? Hmmm... In that case, there must be a really good reason why you did not return home to during the long vacation to study how to properly govern the fief under my husband?

Surely the reason isn't because you wanted to be together with the Second Prince and that Baron's daughter or something like that that you have completely disregarded your responsibilities.”

“That is...”

“First things first, I have received permission from the Queen Dowager to be absent from that party. You, have you become so great to the extent that you can dispute the decision made by a royal?”

“...Tsk.”

Un, this situation has completely fallen into the hands of mother thanks to her tactics. To begin with, even though it is a party sponsored by the royal family, absence is chargeless.

...However, it is done rather rarely. Moreover, the Queen Dowager has given mother her approval... So even if it's the royal family, they cannot say this and that.

“In the first place, to invite the mother of the girl whom he had his engagement annulled, to an engagement party to get engaged to another girl, their motives are suspicious.

In addition, it was only a little over a year since the engagement was annulled. The Queen Dowager as well, she is grieving about it. Since that's the case, my husband who is the Prime Minister might not want to go as well.

However... Because your father has an official position, he will likely attend. And thus, this will be enough to represent our Ducal House.”

Ah... So it was finally the engagement between the Baron’s daughter and Ed-sama. It has almost been two years since that time... Before, I was thinking that the two people who have always been lovey-dovey to have waited for two years sure had a lot of patience.

“Exactly what is it you want. You show your face here and then immediately started raging. ...I doubt your dignity. After all, there’s a saying that those who hang around people with no dignity will be dyed the same color.”

Berne’s face rapidly turned red. Ah, he got angry~ ...I wonder if it was because mother was referring to the Baron’s daughter, Yuri.

“Mother. Even if it mother, it’s not a good thing to say bad things no matter how much you think about it...?”

“Hmph... Right here and now, would you like to denounce your mother? Just like what you did to your older sister?”

Although Berne tried as best he could to counterattack, but it had no effect on mother. If he denounced mother, it will not be possible for him to remain part of the Second Prince’s entourage. In the first place, the Queen Dowager will not be silent about it.

“I am disappointed with you these days. Of course, my husband is also of the same opinion. If you do not clear up your act, we do not mind disinheriting you. And besides, with your older sister governing the fief impeccably well, we have nothing to worry about.”

For the first time in this conversation, she looked at Berne and smiled. Ah, but the smile she has now is scary.

“I’m glad for you. You can stay together with the Baron’s daughter whom you love forever. Ah, however... since you have no charm, after taking your position away from you, you’ll probably be thrown away.”

“...Such a thing, it’s impossible... In the first place, why did that older sister become the fief Lord’s proxy? She committed a rude act towards

someone who is soon to become part of the royal family. Other than losing her social position, she should be exiled immediately.”

“...I don’t know about the future, but right now, she’s a Baron’s daughter. In the first place, It is outrageous for a daughter of just a Baron to bare her fangs towards a daughter of a Duke.

If it wasn’t for the Second Prince who is part of the royal family, and you, the black stain of our House, being at that place, our Ducal House would have immediately crushed the House of that Baron’s daughter.”

Un... Other than holding back because of the Second Prince, Berne was also taken into consideration. I guess that’s true. Although it’s unpleasant, when one fights, they are representing their individual Houses. When a person from your own House condemns another person in your House, it will be too embarrassing to retaliate.

“The fief Lord’s proxy has the same authority as the Lord of the fief. In other words, you, who is unrelated to the fief politics, even if you complain, it will not amount to anything.

In the first place, someone who discriminated against his own family does not benefit the Ducal House and is thus unnecessary.”

“I will not accept this...! Please let me meet with older sister.”

Even though he said he wants to meet with me... I’ve always been sitting right before his eyes. I thought that my presence has been disregarded since a while ago, it looks like I wasn’t wrong. Eh, has he... already forgotten how I look like?

“What will you do after meeting her? Ask her to pass the position of being the fief Lord’s proxy? ...You do not have that authority. To begin with, you don’t have the qualification to call Iris your older sister.”

Mother exhaled a whiff and resumed drinking tea. It looks like she has cooled down a little. Let’s ask Tanya to serve more.

When I casually looked at Tanya, there was a color of doubt reflected in her eyes. She is probably wondering why my younger brother asked to meet me when I was right in front of him.

And the reason he came flying in here in a rage is because of the engagement party of the person whom I was engaged to... is probably what she was thinking.

When I see him face to face, I thought I would tell him off and beat him up... At least I thought that's what I would do. However, now that he's actually in front of me... I don't feel anything.

If I were to put it in a single word: nonexistent. Right now, his existence is similar to a pebble by the roadside. At that time, Berne and I became strangers, and I have already erased his existence in my mind.

Ah, however, I have this bitter thought in my mind from time to time wishing that he would not want to return from that flower garden and succeed in governing the fief.

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### Translator's Message

I thus rename the chapter title to "Mother Obliterates Younger Brother."

# Chapter 25: The Younger Brother's Excursion

“...Please excuse me. Young mistress, it is almost time for your meeting with Sei.”

While there was an awkward atmosphere in the air, Tanya called out to me. ...It's that time already. Because of Berne's sudden arrival, I couldn't relax at all.

“Mother, I must be going soon. Mother, please take your time and relax.”

“Yes, please allow me to do so. Ah, Iris-chan. Can you take this foolish son with you?”

“...Eh?”

‘This foolish son,’ she's referring to Berne, right? But why...?

“Please show this foolish son the way you work and shut him for me. And if he complains, it's fine if you beat him up. Tanya, thank you in advance when the time comes.”

“...I respectfully obey.”

If it's Tanya, I'm pretty sure she'll indeed do it. Well, if he starts getting fussy, it's fine to drive him out... isn't it?

“If that's the case... Let's go, Berne.”

“...Eh? You are... older sister...?”

Berne took a long and hard look at me and seemed surprised. As I thought, he has completely forgotten how I look like?

“That's right. Who else did you think I was. Because I'm running out of time, let's go quickly.”

I immediately headed to the study. And Sei was already standing inside waiting. When Sei saw Berne enter right after me, he furrowed his eyebrows but he soon took his report out and handed it to me.

I once again looked over it.

“...The profits of the confectionery line have decreased a little.”

“It’s because another shop has appeared selling the same product. In addition, it seems like they are selling it at a lower price compared to ours.”

“...It is not necessary to lower the price right now. The consumer will buy whichever product is more delicious.”

“There is also that idea of lowering the buying price of the raw materials...”

“Rejected. If you look at the stock value, this price is reasonable. If you lower it any further than this, it will deteriorate our relationship with the farmers. So to maintain or build a good relationship with them, we should secure a better delivery route.”

To run a successful conglomerate, it is necessary to pursue benefits. However, I do not want to pressure the farmers in the fief in the name of profit. It will be overcharging if it is sold at a higher price, and also, I think it is priced fairly.

“Aside from being lower in price, find out if there’s anything else. Check the line-up of the other companies, and then compare them and do a product review. Also, how is the progress with the cake products we’ll start selling next week?”

“Everything is on schedule, all the preparation has been made and we can start selling them next week. The information about the product called ‘birthday cake’ is being leaked by the common people... but thanks of the cafe originally having cake on the menu, it was favorably accepted by the public. Right now, a lot of inquiries is being made.”

The catchphrase for the advertisement is “a special cake for a special day.” Like a birthday, or a wedding anniversary. When they make a reservation, they could decide the decorations on the cake, the shape of it, and the cream when they order.

“If that’s the case, I’m glad. Please bring the contents of the inquiries to me.”



“It is right here.”

I briefly read the documents handed to me.

“...Most of the inquiries are regarding the reservation method and when it will go on sale. ...When this is up and running, the profits from the confectionery line will increase a little. After that, how will you be managing the inventory?”

“Just like what the young mistress has instructed, we will be selling the leftover designs from the previous stocks little by little at a discounted price.”

“Is that so. ...It will be an ideal to prevent the stocks from running out. But with the current figures and the market, if the drop continues, we will be barely breaking even. Especially those seasonal ingredients, it is best to limit the usage of those because of their scarcity value.”

“I understand.”

“The beauty line is doing well as always. However, we presently... have a situation where the production cannot catch up with the demand...”

“Yes. That product is sold out in all stores...”

“Make a priority to adjust the production of the beauty products. Also, how are the series products doing?”

“That is also progressing steadily. Right now, the Honey series and the Rose series are being sold. Next will be the Lily and Lavender series.”

In this series, for example, the Honey series honey is used to create the beauty lotion, shampoo, and rinse. If it's the Rose series, a rose is used for all of them. They were placed in their respective containers and packaged together.

“Is that so. Please advertise that depending on the person, some ingredients might not be suitable for their skin, so if they start getting a reaction to the products, immediately stop using them.”

“I understand.”

“After that, please bring the report of all the stores to me. Both financial

and periodic reports. I will look at them at night.”

After I said that, Sei said he understood and bowed before leaving the room.

...Now that I think about it, Berne was being really quiet... or so I thought. But when I turned around to look, I saw that Tanya had tied him up with a cloth stuffed in his mouth. However, I thought that it might have been unnecessary. I mean, his eyes were wide open with astonishment for a while now.

When I gave Tanya a look, asking her to take it off, Tanya immediately understood my intention, and she took the cloth off... albeit looking unwilling.

“What’s wrong, for you to make that kind of a dumb expression?”

“...Older sister, is in charge of the management of the conglomerate?”

“It’s because I’m the one who established it in the first place.”

Right after that conversation, someone knocked on the door of the study.

“...Please come in.”

The person who entered was Moneda. Moneda as well, the moment he saw Berne, he furrowed his eyebrows and immediately ignored him as though he doesn’t exist.

“There are some things I would like to consult with you. When I asked Tanya about it, she confirmed that this time would be all right...”

“It’s all right. And so, what would you like to consult with me?”

“It’s about the prices of the commodities here in the fief. As you can see, we have a situation where the prices are continuing to increase slightly.”

“It is really minuscule. It’s probably because the value of money is gradually decreasing, so the prices are on the rise.”

“Yes. Because of that, I was thinking of increasing the interest rate, but...”

“I think it is not yet needed. Although the prices are increasing, it’s really

slight. So right now, the main priority is to stabilize the prices in the market.

The consumption of the town will inflate, the conglomerates will ask the bank for a loan, further amplifying the trend. If you increase the interest rates, you will be throwing cold water on the conglomerates who has taken so much effort on gaining momentum.”

“I see... I heard something good.”

“Once more, open the council and discuss it. If you still want to increase the interest rate after the earlier explanation, please give me a reason I can consent to.”

“I understand, thank you very much.”

“...Umm, older sister...”

“What is it?”

“If I’m not mistaken, the bank, is the financial institution that has been established in our fief recently? Why is older sister the one in charge...”

“When you think about it, does no answer come to mind? If it’s just this much, even if you were to conduct an investigation on your own, you’ll immediately find out... With your position, it is unforgivable for you not to know. Seriously, do you have any intention in succeeding the present Duke as the family head?”

When one thinks about it, Moneda’s way of speaking was really rude, but the argument he made was sound, even Berne couldn’t refute.

“Well, let’s give him the answer to his question this time. The person who proposed the establishment of the bank was your older sister... Iris. Therefore, it is natural for me to come here and consult with her. ...Now then, Iris-sama. I will immediately report the contents of our meeting to the council, will that be all right?”

“Of course. I look forward to your report.”

After Moneda left, Sebastian appeared and replaced him.

“Young mistress. In this meeting, I would like to make a collective report

regarding the management of the fief.”

“Yes, I was waiting for it. First of all, how is the adjustment of the Finance department go?”

“The talk is underway for the reform you want to legislate to lessen the taxes. First, in relation to the product of our fief. Presently, our main products are grain, livestock, cacaos, and various other fruits.

Cacao fruits are strictly produced in our fief, and no other fief is able to produce it. As for grains, thanks to the advance cultivation method achieved by the High School division’s research, we have secured an abundant stockpile. Thus, even if we lessen the tax, they were thinking that we will not experience a decline.”

“...Is that so. On the contrary, it’s a merit?”

“Our fief’s production line is yet to be put in order. Because of that, we can import them cheaply, and we were thinking that it is a big advantage.

In addition, the young mistress’ instructions of conducting trade via sea are now in operation. And we have gathered a lot of ingredients and products that don’t exist in our Kingdom. Because of this, our fief will profit if the conglomerate were to sell these domestically.”

“...I understand. Also, please give me the report of the council meeting and the income tax draft. As for when will be the right time to introduce it, I will give instructions later.”

“I understand.”

“After that, Public Affairs. After they finish making the family registers, ask them to investigate the land. I want them to get clarification on who owns what land. In the future, because the family registers will be a legitimate document here in our fief, make sure they are done without fail.”

“Yes. Presently, the Public Affairs have notified various places in our fief to advise the people. ‘This is an official policy that will benefit our fief, please cooperate with us.’ We are nearly done and will be able to proceed to the investigations shortly.”

“That is splendid news. After that, what is the utilization rates of the primary school in various places?”

“It has increased tremendously. Besides, one can attend it free of charge. Because there are still some districts that don’t have a school yet, that might prove to be a problem in the future.”

“Let’s have the Public Works undertake that task. What about textbooks?”

“It has been separated into different levels. Currently, the children from ages seven to twelve are in the same class, but discussions have occurred to further separate them based on their individual ages sometime soon.”

“Consolidate the age of entrance to be seven years old. And they will advance a grade each school year. However, an examination will be held at the end of each year, and one will be allowed to skip a grade depending on their results, what do you think?”

“I will immediately make a proposal.”

“Then, please bring the reports and income tax drafts we talked about earlier. ...Ah, that’s right. Mother told me to show Berne the way we work... So when you go to the Finance department to collect the documents and the income tax draft, please take him along with you and ask him to calculate the tax revenue of various places.”

Since I’ve been glared at for a while now, I’ve gotten really tired. I’ll have you leave this place without delay. And because he has always been first place in the academy, he should be at least able to do some calculation.

“...Since that’s the case, Berne. Please go do that for me. ...Please fully demonstrate the capability of someone who has always been first place in the academy.”

“...Of course.”

With lifeless eyes, he frantically stood up and followed Sebastian.

...Haahh~ I can finally calm down.

“...Was that all right?”

Tanya asked me while she poured tea.

“What do you mean?”

“To involve that man the in fief’s government.”

“There’s no particular problem with it. I don’t intend to control the information of the fief’s government. And Sebastian went with him, so he probably won’t do anything strange.

However, when it comes to Azura Conglomerate, as expected, I can’t show him too much. And the meeting with Sei earlier only touched upon the contents that have been publicly released.”

Although he is my younger brother, I have absolutely no trust in him. For this reason, when it comes to business, I cannot let him touch Azura Conglomerate.

...As for the fief’s government, other than confidential information and the military, my motto is “Transparent Politics,” so there’s not that much confidential information.

“...Besides, Ryle will be coming here soon. Although they’re called Security Patrol Unit, they are still considered military personnel, so it’s sensitive information. It will be troublesome if that younger brother of mine, being part of his entourage and all, leak this information to the Second Prince. I thought that it was a good excuse to have him leave.”

“That’s right.”

Knock, knock... With perfect timing, I heard a knock on the door.

“Please come in.”

\*

Translator’s Message

Moneda-sama, you’re so awesome! Please use your venomous tongue to degrade him more!

# Chapter 26: Communication

I have settled most of today's work, all that's left is arranging and confirming documents. Because I didn't feel like eating with my younger brother in the evening, I asked Tanya to bring me a light meal. Mother and Tanya didn't mention him in my vicinity, they were probably taking my feelings into consideration.

The skies outside has turned completely dark, and the dim room is only brightened by a lamp. ...I wonder if it is about time I start wearing glasses. Since I've only been looking at detailed reports, it can't be helped if my eyesight worsened.

Knock, knock, a knocking sound echoed in the room. When I asked the person to come in, the one who entered was Berne.

"Is there something you need?"

"...Do you still have work left to do?"

"That's right. It is as you see."

"...Do you always work with this kind of schedule?"

"Since mother and grandfather arrived, it has subdued a little. Back in those days before they came, I would work all day long."

...It might really have been a long time since I've had this kind of talk with my younger brother. It's been almost two years since we last saw each other, and even we were both still at the academy, we had our own entourage so we didn't have much of a chance to communicate with each other.

"...Is that so..."

"Is it all right for me to ask you one question?"

"What is it?"

"...Why did you assist the Second Prince at that time?"

"...Why you ask...? That's because older sister did that to Yuri..."

“You’re talking about... the way I criticized her, and spread false rumors. Were you prepared to undertake the responsibility of the results of what happened?”

“ ... ”

“If you want to succeed father as the next Prime Minister, you should think about the consequences. The consequences of your act and the influence it has.

...I don’t have detailed information regarding your behavior in the Royal City. Nor did I want to know. However, I do know for a fact that your reputation isn’t that good.

Right now, I do not want to let you succeed as the fief Lord, and being the Prime Minister is just a dream within a dream.”

“...It is the duty of their subjects to fulfill the wish of the royal family.”

“The role of the Prime Minister is to oversee the Kingdom according to the King’s will. However, it is also part of his duty to remonstrate against the King when he makes a mistake. ...Besides, you said that it is your duty to realize the wish of the royal family, do you not have to consider the feelings of others?”

Grandfather was the one who told me the duty of the Prime Minister. “Louis-dono has matured splendidly with his role... But as for Berne...” was what he expressed.

“...To conduct things with feelings and to move because of feelings are both different. I made a move because I was overcome with the ugly feelings of jealousy, and it led to that outcome. My number of allies diminished, and I was expelled from the academy. You stood on the other side and denounced me at that time, but now, are you not also facing the same situation?”

It is regrettable to stop the tradition of our family of having the position of being Prime Ministers. I am still in need of more and more power. While I was thinking about that, I thought I might be able to adjust younger brother’s behavior somehow...



“That is all I want to say. Is there something else you would like to ask?”

“...No...”

“Is that so. If that’s the case, please leave. I still have some work to do, so I cannot keep you company any longer.”

When Berne left, I let out a deep sigh. Somehow, I’ve become really tired... As long as that girl is there, Ed-sama will be covered by a shadow. Thus, it is more necessary than ever to have him distance himself from his entourage.

Knock, knock, there was a knock on the door again. I wonder who it is this time?

“...Please excuse me.”

“Oh, my, Sebastian. Is there something wrong?”

“When I passed by the room, I saw that there was still a light. Young mistress, please do go to sleep soon.”

“Just a little more, please wait. I want to look over the report of the Advanced Division. It’s the result of the farming department that Sebastian spoke of earlier in the day. ...Everyone is amazing. Everyone is studying properly and were able to show results... Just looking at it makes me happy.”

“As I thought, the fact that they were able to gather together, have discussions and were given a place to experiment, plays a big role. I also look forward to the developments that will happen in the future.”

“You’re right. Things I did not know and things I couldn’t think of... When I look at it this way, it leaves me with nothing but amazement.”

“...There are also some things that the young mistress doesn’t know, huh.”

“Oh, my, Sebastian. That is only natural. Aside from the accounting department, I am no good with the farming and medical department. That’s why the High School division was made, to leave it to those people who specialize in those fields.”

There's a limit with just myself. Thus, it is best to leave it to those professionals to handle.

“...That is...”

“The Financial department's report. I've already looked at it. We should cut down a little more, or else the negotiation can't continue.”

That kind of disposition, it is necessary to think what kind of influence it will have in a long-term span. When I saw it, my head started getting jumbled up. ...For the sake of my brain, I need a talented person or rather, an Adviser whom I can exchange arguments with.

“You're right.”

“...By the way, Sebastian. How did Berne do?”

“He did the work that was given to him splendidly.”

“I see...”

“...Just between you and me... While we were at the Financial department, he asked about the young mistress. ‘Does older sister always work this much?’ ‘Why does older sister work that much?’”

“...It seems like a somewhat impolite question.”

“Because of that, it is all the more surprising. In the academy, I heard that Berne-sama is a very bright student. Nevertheless, his intelligence doesn't have much effect here. In addition, when he saw the documents that young mistress was working with, he received a shock.”

“You really understand Berne well.”

“It's because I've been watching over him since he was young, Berne-sama's expression is plainly written on his face.”

Well, that is certainly true. Sebastian has been serving our House even before we were born, and he watched us grow up. In a sense, he is similar to being our parents.

“...In addition, I think young mistress has already noticed it. You probably felt Berne-sama's eyes staring at you.”

“Well, that’s right.”

Thanks to him, I am more tired compared to usual.

“It’s because he was observing young mistress for a long time. When we walked out of the room, because the impact he received was too much, he kept staggering.”

“Oh my. I wonder if he has matured a little?”

If he received that much impact, I hope he decides to receive father’s teaching by all means. Earnestly.

“I believe that it so.”

...I wonder if mother was aiming for this all along? Because that child has really high pride, he is easy to understand. I am worried that when he returns to the Royal City, he will go back to that flower garden and continue being part of the Second Prince’s entourage... But since younger brother still some schooling left, he has no choice but to return to the Royal City.

“...Thank you very much for the pleasant talk. It looks like there’s still some hope left. Now then, as Sebastian suggested, I should get some sleep.”

# Chapter 27: Confession Quasi Scout

By the way, younger brother stayed for several days before leaving. He had given up on persuading mother.

...Well, even though mother and the Queen Dowager didn't attend, it seems the party happened without any incident. ...Because the two people didn't attend, it is hard to say whether or not it was a success.

With this, the Baron's daughter is now officially engaged with Ed-sama.

As usual, the First Prince didn't show himself in the Royal City.

And so, the Second Prince graduates this year.

Compared to the First Prince who doesn't show himself, information about the flashy Second Prince reaches this place regularly.

In addition, the Second Prince's faction is admirably made up of aristocrats who enjoy being above others... In other words, other than having good lineage, all they are good at is attending as much superfluous tea parties and balls as possible.

By the way, most of the Houses that are in the Second Prince's faction are facing financial difficulties. They expend too much without thought, and they don't participate in developing their own fief. This information was obtained from the Azura Conglomerate.

In other words, to say it frankly, other than their lineage, those Houses in that faction are in a delicate situation.

In comparison, the First Prince's faction consist of a lot of aristocrats who concentrates in developing their fief, and new aristocrats who gained titles after making impressive achievements.

That said, it means that the Second Prince's faction has similar characteristics with him, flashy and like to throw their weight around.

Father, I am worried that a hole will open in your stomach. Speaking of father, after the engagement party, mother stayed for a while before returning to the Royal City. On the other hand, grandfather is still the

same as before, staying in our house.

As for me, there is no particular change and is still busy every day.



“As I’ve said before, Dean. Won’t you become mine?”

Those were the words I’ve asked for the Nth time, but Dean, without blinking an eye, smiled and responded.

“Although I’m thankful for your words...”

Likewise, this answer has also been said for the Nth time, rejection. Ahh, it's so frustrating.

When one listens to this conversation, it would sound like a confession... No, it sounded more like a dangerous conversation of a madam trying to trick a young man.

In addition, Dean has stunning emerald green eyes, beautiful blonde hair, and a beautiful face. It looks like he also has a trained body, which increases his charm. With his beautiful face, it can only be seen as though he's being wooed... Well, I guess I am trying to woo him.

"HAaaa... I understand. However, I will not give up. For the time being, please take care of me for one week."

"Of course."

What do I mean by one week? It's to help out with the fief's politics as my assistant.

...It all started before mother returned to the Royal City. Utilizing the Commerce Guild's temporary staffing services, where they send talented people to help out during busy times with short-term contracts.

Dean is the person whom we have contracted. At first, although it is a little rude of me to say this, but because I cannot keep tabs on every single member, I didn't know of his existence.

However, details of his reputation and capabilities on the scene had reached me.

Since that is the case... I gave him something to take on individually, and he delivered admirably. Then, I decided to have him undertake a slightly heavier task... that situation happened repeatedly, and he finally became my assistant.

Although mother has never met Dean, she said, "If it's him, I feel like I can leave it to him without any worries." Since I had full confidence in mother's insight and the person she picked, I selected him to become my assistant. Of course, his abilities were guaranteed.

...In any case, I feel at ease. What I had intended and the purpose, he was able to hit upon it on his own. It saves me a lot of time from having to explain it to him, and I can work on other things. When I consider his abilities, he alone can do the work of ten others.

Now then, let's go back to the topic earlier. What I have said that sounded like a confession is actually me trying to scout him. ...Although I want him to formally employ him to undertake the fief's day to day affairs... but he would only accept short-term contracts.

It seems like he has to go back home to help out in his parents' house. That's why, he would stay here to work for one week, and then he would go back for two to three weeks.

Because he's like that, I find it regrettable to part with him and his abilities, so I would scout him every time he comes.

Sometimes I get uncertain and think that I should suspect something, but since the fief's government doesn't really have much confidential information, there shouldn't be any problems. ...Mother's words also played a big role.

"Yes, here's the income and expenditure reports of the academies and next year's budget application."

"...Oh, the format seems to be in order."

"I made some modifications."

"Thank you. A primary school has been founded in all regions... and I was thinking of opening up a middle school for vocational training."

"It would be difficult to do so with the existing budget."

"Well, that's right. As I thought, we need to make a change to stabilize tax revenue..."

"That said, the Sales Tax is a little premature. The basis of taxation is Fairness, Simplicity, and Equality. We are currently at the stage where the primary schools are still newly founded, but the literacy rate will slowly increase. The people will start to understand. Large stores aside, it will still

be difficult for small shops.”

“That, right there is...”

“Although I said that, I think it’s a novel idea. After the literacy rate goes up a little more, and then, after a while, introduce the arithmetic and spread it little by little.”

“Un~ ...I wonder if I should start to head off in that direction?”

Ruffling through the papers, I found the draft of the income taxes.

“To abolish poll tax, and shift to income taxes... I am quite uncertain about that. As I’ve reported earlier, the basis of taxation is Fair, Simple, and Equal. Also, the people have all been participating in paying poll taxes, and have all regarded it as acceptable.”

“Being too equal is also a problem. To impose taxes on a child who doesn’t have the ability to pay them. It can only be considered as shackles to those breadwinners.”

That’s right, I do think that poll taxes is the idea tax.

It’s easy, and it’s equal. But I think that it’s too equal, it is impossible to consider it as fair. In addition, for it to be imposed to those who do not have the abilities to pay them, it will become a heavy load for them.

“...Certainly, there’s also that way to view it.”

“Right now, the draft is about imposing taxes based on an individual’s earnings... But since it will be difficult to calculate the income taxes of farmers, so the plan was to have the public office calculate it based on their ‘Deemed Harvest’ and collect taxes from there.”

“Is it because of that that you’ve asked the Public Affairs to work on clarifying the boundaries of the lands?”

“That’s right. ...Of course, it’s not only for that purpose.”

“I see. Since that will be the case, it will be easy to analyze the harvest of the crops depending on the climate year each.”

“Uun~ That’s right.”



“About that, can the public office find enough staff to do those calculations?”

“I told the Financial department to let the students who are currently enrolled in the Finance course participate alternately. Not to mention the Finance department, I intend to employ the graduates for that sector. The people’s knowledge will improve sooner or later, so it would be ideal for them to learn about taxes.”

“...That is something that will probably take a long time.”

“Well, I wasn’t expecting the results to be immediate. That’s why I said sooner or later. In addition, we shouldn’t just consider the taxes for individuals, we also have to prepare the taxes concerning the companies and conglomerates.

Right now, the calculations of taxes of the conglomerates’ earnings are being jumbled up with the presidents’ earnings. It has turned out that way because the presidents of these companies and conglomerates receive salaries from them.

First, let’s have the companies file separate taxes from their President’s personal income, and then have the companies send an application to receive their dedicated tax rates.”

“...What will you do if the conglomerates and companies rebel?”

“Don’t you think this will alleviate them from paying more taxes? Currently, they have to pay import and export taxes each time they enter and exit each city. With this, when they import and export to other places other than our fief or to a different country, they will pay fewer taxes in the future. ...In that situation, distribution will also increase.”

“Certainly, it will be able to somewhat moderate their repulsion. Because each company and conglomerates currently have someone enrolled in the accounting course to learn double-entry bookkeeping, it will help when they calculate their accounts. ...This way, it will not increase their burden to some extent.”

“That’s how it is. The conversation we had earlier, let’s talk it over once

more with the people from the Finance department.”

# Chapter 28: Young Mistress, Collapsed

With Dean assisting and shortening the time needed to work on fief management, I recently have time to spare to go to town. As I thought, I feel refreshed every time I go to town.

“Ah, Dean! I wonder if it’s fine if we make the orphanage as our last stop?”

“If that is Alice-sama’s wish.”

By the way, when I headed to town, I invited Dean along. Because work ended early... I was thinking of ways to pay him back, it suddenly came to my mind.

In the beginning, Tanya strongly opposed the idea. While saying, “To actually suggest bringing someone whose character is unknown.” But because of mother’s recommendation and grandfather’s presence, I managed to pull through.

By the way, although Dean is not used to children, he is quite good at handling them. Because of that, compared to me, he is more popular. ... When I think about it, I’m quite frustrated, but after seeing the happy faces of the children, I decided to hold it in.

“Onii-chan, onee-chan. Will you come here again?”

The child approached us and looked up at us with an upward glance. Ahh, so cute...!

“Of course. Right, Dean?”

“Yeah. Therefore, please be a good child and wait a little.”

When dusk came, I, who enjoyed myself to the fullest, left the orphanage to return home. Un. I had a lot of fun today. Let’s do our best again tomorrow.

Although I took a break from time to time when mother came to visit, but as always, there was no day offs. However, when Dean came, I have recently been taking days off and coming to town.

Or rather, when Dean is here, work unexpectedly finishes early, as a result, it was fine even if I take a day off. As I thought, days off really are important.

“...Alice-sama...”

“Because we’re already inside the compound, it’s all right if you don’t call me Alice anymore.”

With me retort, Dean laughed lightly.

“Pardon me. Young mistress, why do you work so hard to that extent?”

Because of the sudden and unexpected question, I stopped walking.

“You, yourself, aren’t you working hard as well?”

“It is different for me. I am working because I need to do it to live. However, the young mistress is different. As a daughter of a Duke, a daughter of the Prime Minister... even if you don’t work, won’t you still be able to survive?”

Well, that is certainly true. Among the aristocrats, it is rare for a woman to work. To protect the house and manage the household is the wife’s duty. Even in our fief, it was the butlers and the other employees who were arranged to manage our house and the fief.

“But I was granted the position of the fief Lord’s proxy by father. And to work befitting of our position, isn’t that what being an aristocrat is all about?”

“With all due respect... the image I had of aristocrats are people who do nothing but exploit taxes of the people of their fief, and continued to live that way. In addition, the young mistress could do what the fief Lord has done and leave it all to Sebastian-san.”

“That method, it’s not as though it has never crossed my mind. But as I thought, since I have been given the responsibility... even though I’m still inexperienced, I thought to give it my best. And it is also an opportunity. But now...”

I gently looked at my hand. ...A very, very small hand. It holds the life

and future of the fief's people, but yet very undeserving to protect them, and so I laughed while looking at myself.

“When I met the children in that orphanage, I thought that even if it's me... No, because it's me, I can do it. When I do my best, if it increases the smile of the people even just a little... If the people can find happiness, wouldn't that be such a great thing?”

“...You are right.”

When he gave a beautiful smile, I was fascinated for a moment. ...That was dangerous, too dangerous. Because Dean's smile has destructive powers, I really need to be careful. I became slightly embarrassed, so I quickly thanked everyone and headed to my room in a rush. Ah, really... I'm not that kind of character.

...And then, two days later. At the end of Dean's contract, I collapsed for the first time since I came here. Up until now, I have always taken care of my health... so why?

But because of my high fever, I couldn't concern myself with thinking of such matters, and so I slept.

The next time I opened my eyes, the room has already gotten dark. ... Was I sleeping for the entire day?

“...Haaa...”

Taking care of one's health is the basics of the basics when it comes to work. I collapsed and then spent the whole day sleeping... I still have ways to go.

“...Tanya.”

Although my voice sounded a little hoarse, my throat seems to be fine. ... In any case, I feel thirsty. I feel unpleasant because I perspired a lot and my clothes were sticking to my skin.

When I called out, Tanya who was waiting inside my room immediately arrived beside my bed. And the expression on her face looked a little angry, and she seemed to have cried.

“...Please give me, some water. After that, please bring me a towel dipped in water and wrung. I want to wipe my body.”

“I understand.”

She probably already had it prepared. She shortly handed me a glass of water and I quickly drank it. ...Un, it permeates down my throat.

After that, Tanya promptly handed me a wet towel to wipe myself with.

...Tomorrow, I wonder how much work had piled up ...Just thinking about it scares me. Dean had already returned to his parents' house by the end of this morning. Ah, I shouldn't have rested yesterday... Although I would think that, it's too late to regret it. In any case, today I will fully rest myself, and began to fall asleep.

The next morning, while my body still felt heavy, I dragged myself to the study. Ah, I wonder how much documents have piled up... While I was thinking that, I opened the door and found the usual amount of documents on top of the desk... No, it's a slightly less than usual.

“Eh...?”

While I was wondering why, with perfect timing, someone knocked on the door, and the person who entered was Dean.

“Dean! What's wrong? Weren't you supposed to leave yesterday morning?”

“Young mistress as well, is your body all right now?”

“Yes. Because I was able to rest for all of yesterday. That aside, this amount...”

“I finished everything I could with my authority. All that's left are the documents and reports that need the young mistress' approval.”

“Is that so... Thank you. However, Dean. Will you be all right? I mean, aren't you delayed by one day?”

“The young mistress wasn't feeling well, there's no way I can leave like that. I will be leaving tomorrow, though.”

“...I’m really sorry to have caused you trouble.”

“It’s fine. Because it’s something I did on my own. Now then, please look over these.”

After Dean placed the documents on the desk, he left the room. When he left, I roughly looked at the documents he left on the desk. ...There’s no particular problem. And I’m troubled because there isn’t any problem.

“...Haaa...”

I unintentionally blew out a heavy sigh. ...It is no good at this rate. At this rate, I will end up depending on him. In terms of work and other things. ...It’s like that even now. Because he is around, I feel relieved. I rely on him. ...At the same time, I want him to stay.

However, it’s no good. ...I don’t want to feel like this anymore. I realized it at that time with the situation with Ed-sama. A person will one day betray others. Because of that reason, I believe that I must stand on my own two feet.

It has always been like that. I’ll accept the help. I will rely on others. If it’s this person, I can leave it to them, and I start trusting them. However, on the other hand, how much can I can leave it to this person... and how much I can trust that person, I drew a line. Since that was the case, it would have been fine if they ever betray me.

...Nevertheless, he is trying to destroy that line. He is slowing creeping into the depths of my heart without permission, making me want to leave everything to him. That’s why... I’m scared.

I strongly deny that thought and shook my head from side to side. ...Let’s not think about this any further. By not thinking about it and putting a cap on it... before one realizes, that thought has already disappeared.

# Chapter 29: Idle Talk - Displeasing Chat between the Second Prince and Acquaintances

My name is Berne. Berne Tash Armelia. I am the heir to the Dukedom of Armelia, the son of the Prime Minister, Louis Dan Armelia.

“Good morning Edward-sama. Yuri-sama.”

“Ah.”

“Good morning, Berne.”

I called out to the two people who were walking in front. Ed-sama has bright crimson hair color, the same as Ellia-sama, the second Queen, and a distinctive jet-black pair of eyes. With his upturned eyes, it tends to give others the impression that he's strict.

But when he's with Yuri-sama, the corner of his eyes will drop a little, making his overall facial expression look friendlier. When Ed-sama was still engaged with my older sister, Iris, I've never seen him have this kind of expression. I think it's because he finds her really, really precious that he can't help but display that expression.

As for the person next to him, Yuri-sama, she has braided brown fluffy hair. It is a kind of hairstyle that's rarely seen and it looks very impressive. She also has big beautiful green eyes, and with her constant changing expression, she looks lovely overall. She is someone who always remains positive, at least I think so.

“Hey, Berne. You didn't stay up late again to study, did you?”

“Yes, well...”

“Oh dear, Berne is overdoing himself again~?”

“No, I'm not overworking myself. It's because I want to study a little, I'm all right.”

When I saw Yuri-sama's anxious expression, my chest started to feel



really warm. The only thing I'm particularly good at... to receive Yuri-sama's concern... as I thought, it was just studying.

'Berne-sama, you're so amazing~' If I'm not mistaken, that was the first thing she said when she called out to me. At that time, I didn't have any interest in her at all, and I'm certain I even treated her coldly. Or rather, I didn't know what was so amazing about it.

For me to get first place, I thought it was 'natural,' and I didn't even consider it being snatched away. However, to her, always being in first place is amazing because she's terrible at studying, and she came up to me and asked me to teach her many, many times.

Because it felt comfortable to be around her, by the time I noticed it, I was teaching her all the time. While teaching her, and seeing her improve little by little because of my instructions, somehow brought a warm feeling to my heart.

'Berne-sama, please look at this~ Thanks to Berne-sama, my grades went up so much~' In the beginning, her grades were only so-so, and having improved so much, she happily showed me her report card.

When I saw it, I felt really glad that I was able to help. ...Before I knew it, I felt comfortable hearing her high-pitched voice as though it was healing me.

...Even though I have been approached many times, I have never felt this way before. In the end, it didn't work out well, and she was taken by Ed-sama. Even so, as long as she was happy, it was fine... I just wanted to stay by her side... That's what I thought.

In any case, because of that time, before I knew it... I was convinced that I was amazing. I have not gone down from being first place, and I can usually remember things after hearing it once. That's why I thought that.

However, my way of thinking was shattered just the other day. And the person who destroyed it was my older sister, Iris.

When she was in the academy, she was not a very bright student. However, when I went back to the fief recently... I saw my older sister

being the director of the conglomerate, and governing the fief as the fief Lord's proxy.

Because of that, I saw her struggling with documents stacked as high as a mountain, having conversations regarding topics I do not understand, giving consultations, and once again scuffle with documents. After she admonished me, she went back to work... So busy with work that looking at it makes me dizzy.

When I saw her appearance, to be honest... I received a shock. I thought that I, myself, was someone amazing... But what exactly does that mean? The only source of knowledge is experience.

Compared to her... I'm just a kid with a functioning head. No... It's probably not just her, there are probably more people. But that wasn't the only thing I saw.

And because of that, I recently went to father and begged to receive his teaching. I cannot go on this way, that's what I thought. Above all, I was mortified.

Under the strict supervision of father, I was forced to tackle many challenges. As a result, I was forced to stay up all night in order to handle it.

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When I looked towards the entrance of the academy, I saw Dorsen there. As usual, he stands out with his short hair and muscular body.

"...Good morning."

"Oh, Dorsen. Good morning."

"Good morning, Dorsen. Although you look really tired... Are you okay?"

"Yeah. It's because I underwent a harsh training yesterday. But I am okay."

Although he's usually reticent and deadpan, but if one was to look closely, he does seem really tired. That said, he doesn't really look that different compared to normal.

“Is that so... Just don’t overwork yourself, okay?”

“Thank you very much.”

If I’m not mistaken, Dorsen has been strangely participating in the Knights’ training as of late. Dorsen’s father, Druna-sama said that it would be an opportunity for him to “forge and temper his character” and was forced to participate.

...It was probably because mother was absent at the tea party conducted by Dorsen’s house, the Katabelias... and they were subbed at official functions... That might be the reason why Druna-sama dragged Dorsen there. In other words, putting it simply, it was mother’s retaliation.

...About this situation, I only found out this inside story after I went to look for father. Because of this, I remembered what my older sister said at that time, “think about the consequences of your actions.”

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When we arrived at the classroom, everyone looked towards us and gave their greetings. ...Well, since she is now officially engaged to the Second Prince... I guess it was only natural that they greet her.

When we sat down on our seats, the bells coincidentally began to chime, and the door opened once more.

“...Good morning~”

“Oh, good morning. Van.”

The person who arrived in the nick of time was Van Lutasha. He is the son of the Pope of the Darryl Religion. The purpose of the Pope of the Darryl religion and the religion itself is to aid generations of generations of aristocrats. Because of that, although Van isn’t an aristocrat, he is enrolled at a school of aristocrats.

“Van, you are slow as always~ You barely made it just in time~”

“For me, I think I arrived here rather early. That aside, Yuri-sama’s hair has become really beautiful.”

“Thank you very much~ Or rather, even though Van is praising me, I

don't feel like I'm being praised."

Van has shoulder-length blonde hair. His hair is really glossy and is rarely found even amongst women. Long and narrow eyes, and androgynous features.

"That's not true at all. It really does look beautiful."

"Th-thank you very much~ I'm sure it's definitely thanks to Azura Conglomerate's beauty products."

"Ah, that place, huh."

"Yes~ Now that you mentioned it, I finally became a member~"

"For a mere conglomerate to actually keep my fiancée waiting..."

Ed-sama said bitterly while clicking his tongue.

"Ed-sama, you cannot say something like that~ It's because other people had to wait for some time, so it's only natural for me to wait as well."

"Yuri is so gentle."

However, after being persuaded by Yuri-sama, his expression changed.

...Or rather, for Yuri-sama to become a member... I can't say I'm not surprised. Such a thing actually happened. I will not be surprised if these two fail to become members... Or rather, I am more convinced it would be like that.

However, "that" older sister, to prevent a dispute between the royal family and the conglomerate, she probably suppressed her emotions and did what was best for the conglomerate... Surely the employees who adore older sister would have felt like they had to swallow something bitter.

"That conglomerate really is very popular~ I am still waiting for mine."

"That's right~ I'm sure that their president is an amazing person. I respect that person. I really want to meet the person once~"

"Since Yuri wants to meet the person, let's invite them to the Royal Castle once. I'm sure that the other side will be extremely pleased and honored."

“That’s a really good idea~”

...I think she absolutely won’t come. In the first place, the people of the fief of Armelia are considerably angry with the Second Prince. Because when I went there, not only mother, but as soon as I was separated from older sister, the other employees completely disregarded me as though I was a thorn on their sight. Even if it wasn’t older sister, but someone else was president... for example Sei or Sebastian, I’m sure they wouldn’t go either.

“...Speaking of the Royal Castle, how was the talk about the previous matter~?”

“Ah, about the church’s soup kitchen. Of course, I got the approval. Hey, Van.”

“Yes. The Darryl church should also be pleased to help out.”

“I’m really glad it turned out that way~ I’m sure that everyone will be pleased.”

“Yeah. Of course, since Yuri will be the one doing it, everyone should be pleased.”

...Yuri-sama is a gentle person. She made a proposal for Ed-sama to open a soup kitchen for the people, and Ed-sama also aggressively made a move.

However. ...To conduct it frequently, they have probably already calculated how much budget it will need.

That is only a natural thing to do. The Royal Family is living the same as before... Or rather, their expenditures has increased. This is because Ellia-sama spent a lot on herself, and Ed-sama has splurged quite a bit for Yuri-sama’s present. Nevertheless, the tax revenue has not changed.

‘If you want to live for the people, the first thing you should do is to reexamine your own life... For example, that in engagement, instead of being happy with Ed-sama’s present, she could have donated it to the people. However, that girl keeps extorting presents, which is ill-natured of her.’ Father said with indignation.

To ask for present, it was still fine if it was just once or twice, but it has happened repeatedly to the point where the Treasury is being squeezed.

Although father and other ministers were opposed to the idea from the very start, it was still forcefully carried out by other, and the expenses started to pile up.

In addition, a soup kitchen is being carried out in the Royal City. ...In reality, there aren't many people who are in need of help. Father complained that they are just trying to earn popularity.

If the labor cost is cut down, it means that the incomes of the people will also decrease. As a result, even the people who should have been somewhere in the middle class will also be poor.

Up until now, I've always thought that Yuri-sama is a gentle person... But I might not have seen anything at all.

"...Right now, conducting it frequently will put a large burden on the National Treasury. This time, don't you think it'll be better to reconsider?"

"Why is Berne saying something like that? Isn't it the top priority to help the lives of the people? Everyone is happy, isn't that a good thing..."

"Although it's a good thing, it won't be good if it's too frequent. Yuri-sama, please don't say too many unreasonable things to Ed-sama..."

"Ed-sama is the Prince of this Kingdom. Can't a Prince do whatever he likes? If the Kingdom doesn't have enough budget, it will be fine to take it from the taxes~ Ah, and also, how about disbanding the military? Un, that's a good idea~ Since this Kingdom is really peaceful, the military is unnecessary~ Right, Ed-sama?"

Yuri-sama had a bright smile on her face as though she has thought of an ingenious idea. I, however, couldn't hide my surprise because of her words.

I thought that she seem like a small child. An inhumane... innocent child. If one thinks about it a little, judging from the aspect of national defense, and the standpoint of peace and order, it is something that cannot be said. Above all, what will happen to those people who would

lose their jobs. ...The future will be a beeline towards to the soup kitchen.

“Ah, Yuri is so smart. ...Berne. You are being obstinate. You sounded like a retainer from somewhere.”

“...I’m sorry for the impertinent words I’ve said.”

Ed-sama glared at me, and I shut my mouth. ...Ah, father will probably once again explode in anger. No, he has been angry. And because I wasn’t able to stop it, he’ll probably get angry at me.

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### Translator’s Message

So, what are your opinions regarding Yuri? Also, for the safety of our borders, I hope no one else thinks that the military is useless...

# Chapter 30: Gratitude towards Grandfather

“...Hmm, that child has probably already graduated...”

“...Iris-sama, is there something the matter?”

When I accidentally said those words out loud, Tanya reacted.

“Un... I was wondering if Berne has already graduated.”

It has been two years since I left that academy. When I think about how those members have already graduated, I felt a deep emotion.

According to the story in the game, one year after graduating from the academy, the protagonist will successfully capture someone and it will lead to a happy ending.

It was similar to Ed-sama's route... where I was denounced and expelled from school, and they lived happily ever after. Of course, if she wasn't able to capture anyone, it will lead to a normal end, and the current harem situation... did not exist in the game.

That said, the Second Prince's route is the only one that's different, because the story ends the before their graduation, so I have no idea whatsoever on what happens after that. Well... the only thing I know is that the situation when I regained the memories of my previous life was the ending of the game.

By the way, although it's a little late for me to say this now, Berne and I are children born within the same school year. I was born between January 1st and April 1st while Bern was born after April 1st. In other words, we are in the same grade, and Berne will graduate at the same time with Ed-sama.

“...Young mistress, do you miss being in the academy?”

“If you ask if I miss it, then I do... But that is all there is to it. Because those dark days have been driven out of my mind, I don't remember much anymore.”



“So it’s like that...”

“I wonder if their graduation will bring about fortune or misfortune... Well, I guess it’s a good thing for our House since Berne will be able to separate from them.”

“There isn’t any particular reason for the young mistress to worry about that person.”

Tanya, for the time being, Berne is still the heir of our House... She has splendidly thrown that fact aside.

“Because if this Kingdom survives, I would like the fief to have some kind of pipeline. Although it will be a while before it’s time for father to retire as the Prime Minister... I want Berne to be prepared to take over the position sometime in the future.”

“...According to the young mistress’ words, this country will be destroyed?”

“That is something I cannot predict. Since the Second Prince has graduated, the earnest struggle will begin, so there is a possibility...”

Unlike the happy ending portrayed in the game, their happily ever after... will probably end. After all, once the fight against the First Prince and the Second Prince intensifies, the country will likely become impoverished.

“Now that I think about it, a letter from Master came. How was it?”

“Un? ...Somehow, he said he was thankful. It seems that Berne went to father by himself. But it wasn’t as though I did something, so if he wanted to thank someone, he should thank mother.”

To be honest, I don’t really care much about whatever happens to Berne. If I were to put it in a certain way, he would be someone I would use if he can be put to use... or something like that.

“However, young mistress, excuse me for being forward... But when you received the letter, you seem slight depressed after reading it...”

“Yes, well... The letter also had some information written about Ed-

sama.”

I was really surprised by it. As for what I was surprised with, apparently Berne told father some of the conversation he and Ed-sama had while in the academy. But what was even more surprising was the contents.

I mean, it's that Berne! Berne actually brought up the burden the situation has on the National Treasury... But when he said that, 'Why don't we disband the military,' it became that kind of conversation.

When grandfather heard it from father, he went berserk. “The budget provided to the military isn't unnecessary. If you want to reduce the budget, you should decrease the number of Knights.”

That's what he said. Well, certainly, the Kingdom is not domestically stable for now. And grandfather stood on the front lines during the war against Towair...

Although there is no ongoing war against other countries, it wasn't as though there was a formal cease-fire with the Towair Kingdom, and because of that, we cannot be at ease. Because of that information, grandfather got really worried about the situation and returned to the Royal City.

“...Really, how annoying.”

When Tanya accidentally leaked those words, I pulled myself together. Because she is usually an expressionless girl, and for her to say something like that, I was really scared.

“Tanya, it's not as though I got depressed because of Ed-sama nor was I thinking about him. However, for just a moment, I was really surprised with the contents of the letter.”

“Nevertheless, it is preposterous for young mistress to feel anxious because of this.”

“Thank you very much for worry about me, Tanya.”

Because I'm really grateful for her worrying about me, I gave my thanks.

“...Now then, we should return to work.”

After the tea time had ended, I went back to the study. After grandfather went back, the mansion felt larger all of a sudden. ...Grandfather really has that kind of presence.

“Oh, my... Ryle, Dida. What’s wrong?”

While I was walking down the corridor, I encountered them right in front of the study.

“I came here to report.”

“I only tagged along because I was bored.”

“...What have I been telling you... you should watch what you say in front of the young mistress.”

When Dida answered in an easygoing manner, Ryle glared at him. Now that I think about it, how many times have they had these kinds of exchanges? While I was thinking about it, I sat on the chair.

“It’s fine, Ryle. Aside from that, how are the guards doing?”

“They are doing quite well. Because while Gazelle-sama was here, he supervised their training daily.”

Un, since it came out from Ryle’s mouth, the result is probably good.

“That’s right. They have reached the point where they can keep up with our swordsmanship.”

“Well... that is wonderful to hear.”

Tanya unexpectedly said words of praise. Un, for them to actually be able to keep up with Ryle and Dida’s swordsmanship, it means that their skills have improved. A while back when I went to observe the practice training incognito, the only thing I saw was them hackling their sword at Ryle and Dida.

...Or rather, Ryle and Dida, exactly how strong are you guys. A little before grandfather left, I remember him saying, “I lost to those two! I must be getting old.”

...Because grandfather hasn’t been defeated up until now, he was slightly

annoyed. Nevertheless, before he went back, he would have mock battles with Ryle and Dida daily. And in my opinion, his eyes were sparkling like a child having lots of fun.

“Young mistress... the fact that these two people were able to match up with him in terms of swordsmanship means that if they were in the military or part of the Knight Order, they would be very influential people.”

“That certainly is magnificent. Please continuously do your best.”

..Grandfather, thank you very much. I secretly gave my thanks to grandfather. Though I still have some questions why grandfather would want to strengthen our guards. ...Well, if anything were to happen in this country, it is important for them to have enough strength to protect the people of our fief.

# Chapter 31: Idle Talk - Various Speculations (1)

“Come to think of it, Alfred. Recently, it seems that you’ve been going out a lot with Ludy.”

I called out to my grandson, Alfred. My name is Arya von Tasmeria. This Kingdom’s... The Kingdom of Tasmeria’s Queen Dowager. The person in front of me is Alfred. My grandson, and the First Prince. And the person who is standing on the side is Ludy. He is Alfred’s childhood friend and his aide.

“Yes, grandmother. I’ve been busy with something lately.”

Although he responded with a smile... This grandson of mine, I cannot accurately read his expressions. The smile he has looks all too natural. If I didn’t live in a world where trickery is the norm in social circles, I probably would not have noticed it either.

“Even if it’s me, I know about it. Because Ellia and Ed have been perpetrating a lot of things recently, so you probably had to follow up with the Prime Minister, right?”

Although it’s unfortunate, our Kingdom still shouldering the debt from the war that occurred thirty years ago. That said, the debt is gradually being repaid, and unless we do something untactful, there shouldn’t have been any problems.

However, Ellia and Ed pulled it off magnificently. Frequently opening soup kitchens for the people, Ellia purchasing a number of dresses for which I don’t know if there will be enough official events for her to wear them all, and buying a new dress for Ed’s new partner to wear during their engagement...

Afterward, after the engagement party, Ed went to travel to resorts with the new person he was engaged with... The girl’s name was Yuri or something if I’m not mistaken... And she said, “This is a great place. It would be great if more people can enjoy it.” And because of that... it

seemed like Ed took it to an extreme and decided to develop that resort.

Lastly, they seemed to have splendidly opposed the Prime Minister's notion, acted extremely unreasonable and refused to listen to anything. In the end, the opposition of paying for Yuri's clothes eventually fell on deaf ears.

...In the first place, paying for Yuri's clothes with the royal family's budget is strange. Because of Ellia spoiling Edward too much, he has grown impudent and it has become really troublesome.

The budget of the Kingdom is divided between the royal family and for national management.

The royal family's budget should be used for the royal family's private lives.

As for the funds meant for national management, just like its name says, it should be used to operate the Kingdom. Take my clothes, for example, the royal family's budget is used to purchase clothes I usually wear. But for official functions, funds is taken out from the national budget because it necessary for the Kingdom's management.

The wages paid to my personal maid who takes care of my daily needs are taken from the royal family's budget. However, the court ladies who takes care of me as the Queen Dowager, they are paid using the national budget.

To be honest, I'm not completely certain about the difference between a lady's maid and a court ladies... For example, if I want to send a personal letter, the help of a lady's maid will do.

But if I want to send a letter as the Queen Dowager, the help of a court lady is necessary. Because depending on the situation, it would be imperative for them to look over the contents of the letter and compare it with past cases to make sure they match.

In terms of wardrobe, the lady's maid helps me to get dressed up, while the court ladies checks to see if my clothing is suitable for the event.

Although the story has gone astray, sometimes discussions happen

whether things should be paid by the royal family's budget or the national budget.

But in this case... Yuri is still just a person engaged to a member of the royal family. That being said, usually, there is no way to spend either the royal family's budget or the national budget on her.

"Yes, they have spent quite an amount of money, and even inside the castle, they have also been doing various things. The Queen's maternal family, the Marquis House and their faction. Because of that, I've been forced out of the shadows to find a talented person. And the result is as you can see."

"After Sharia was gone, the originally dependable King... became feeble and has to stay in his sickbed. Right now, because the information is being controlled, it has yet to be discovered by the public, but it won't be long before they do."

"Yes. Because of this, the Marquis House will gain even more momentum."



“...Alfred.”

Looking at Alfred who is still smiling calmly, I called out his name to give him a warning.

“...Yes, I understand. I have no intention of dying just yet. However, I still cannot stand on the stage for a while.”

“It’s good if you understand.”



“Until all the preparation is complete, I will remain as I am until the time comes.”

“So this means that until you can find a capable person, your preparations will not be complete.”

“...I really cannot keep a secret from grandmother.”

Although he did not confirm my suspicion, I'm still satisfied with his response. If it's Alfred, I can trust that he will be able to do it.

“Oh, since that's the case... you've been going out a lot with Ludy recently. Leticia has been feeling lonely. You should talk to her for a bit.”

Leticia is Alfred's younger sister from the same mother. Although she's younger than Ed, she's more intelligent than him, and like me, she's betting on Alfred.

“...That is, I will talk to her sometime soon.”

Alfred once again gave a smile with unreadable feelings. ...Like this, it means that he doesn't intend to talk about it.

And then, after talking to Alfred about some other things, he left together with Ludy.

\*

“Fufu...”

When I was the only one left in the room, I thought back to the conversation Alfred and I had. While I was thinking about it, I couldn't help myself from being happy and smile.

Although Alfred didn't mention a thing about it... I pretty much knew their destination. Even though they went here and there... In the end, they proceeded to the Duke of Armelia's fief.

My expectation might be realized... No, because I really think it will be realized that I became really happy just thinking about it.

My motive is to have the daughter of the Duke marry someone from the royal family. ...Or rather, it's because I really love Melly.

When I saw that girl with a doll-like and beautiful features, I wanted to make her my daughter by all means. However, at that time, Mellice was already engaged to the heir of a Dukedom, she was engaged to Louis. Because Melly has loved Louis since she was very little, I tearfully gave up. Because if I were to force it, I will be disliked and avoided by Mellice.

Nevertheless, I didn't completely give up. If Melly gave birth to a girl, I will have her engage to my grandson no matter what it takes.

Afterward, I heard from Louis that the long-awaited girl was born, and I was happy to know that she was named Iris. My name... the "Ai" part of Arya (Ai-ri-ya) and "Ris" of Mellice (Meru-risu) put together. Because I had not seen her face then... I wondered if she was born premature, but when Melly brought the young Iris to see me, I fell in love with her. Her face was a splitting image of Melly's. Although the color of her eyes was similar to Louis, a deep shade of blue, but that itself had its own elegance.

I'm absolutely going to make her my grandchild... If possible, rather than Ellia's son Ed, I thought that Alfred would be better politically. But when Sharia passed away, a lot of commotion happened around Alfred and Leticia, so in the end, she was engaged to Edward.

To get engaged to one of the royal family? Because I didn't specifically implied whom, some complication happened. I didn't think I had to do something about it since it was clear that Melly dislikes Ellia so she wouldn't have agreed to have Iris engaged to Ed... But I didn't think that Iris would fall in love with Ed.

Because the two people really love their daughter, they agreed.

...Well, since she will still eventually become my grandchild, I reluctantly agreed to it, but I didn't think that the engagement would be suddenly annulled.

When I heard what happened, I thought that my objective has been thwarted again... But when I thought about it again very carefully, it was a chance for me.

This time, I'll definitely make sure that Alfred marries Iris... and make that lovely girl my grandchild. As the saying goes, if you fail twice, there's

always a third time... I will absolutely not fail this time. No matter what it takes, I'll make sure they get married, and make that child my granddaughter.

...For that to happen, I must make my move... First things first, “she has been expelled from society,” so I must make Iris return to society.

According to my calculations, it will not benefit her if I just ask her to return to society.

Since she was expelled from the academy, she has not once shown her face in society. ...If she did come out, she would have turned into a laughing stock because her engagement was annulled.

However, right now, she has done superbly well in managing their fief and is the president of the famous conglomerate... Or rather, to give up that kind of girl, it will be highlighted as Ed's blunder.

Right now, all I have to do is create an opportunity for her to appear in society.

Now then, I should also make my move.

\*

### Translator's Message

Due to the votes of the majority, I have changed Mary to Melly and Marilyn to Mellice.

~~Rudy's name is actually “Ludius,” but it sounds strange to me. What do you guys think? Rudius or Ludius? Ludius it is!~~

I guess everyone has already called it? Alfred equals Dean?

Cough, cough, AHM

This chapter marks the end of Volume 1, I hope that everyone has enjoyed the novel thus far, and we'll continue with Volume 2 tomorrow!

# Chapter 32: Discovery

“...And they live happily ever after. We’ll stop today’s story-telling here.”

When I closed the open book, the children all had dissatisfied expressions and announced,

“Eh~, more, more!”

“Please read this picture book next.”

Ah, I’m being healed. Surely if one was to look at my expression now, they will think that I can’t endure it any longer.

I am currently holding myself back from reading some more.

“I’m really sorry. I must truly head home for today. I will definitely come some other time, so please forgive me.”

“Eh~...”

“When will you come?”

After hearing the lonely tone of the children’s voices I almost wanted to say, if possible I want to stay here forever...

“Although I do not know when, but I’ll definitely return. Okay? I promise you.”

“I understand~”

“...When you come back next time, please read the picture book.”

“Yes, of course.”

After I said goodbye to the children, I headed inside the orphanage and greeted Mina-sensei.

...Haaa~ I don’t want to return.

When I retire sometime in the future, I wondered if I should work at the orphanage... Or rather, I’ve been seriously considering it.

Marriage... That hope has been destroyed the moment my engagement with a royal family member was annulled. Because that happened, my

marriage ended up nothing but a destroyed dream.

Sometime in the future, I will have to retire from managing the conglomerate and the fief. When that time comes, I want to live quietly while being surrounded by children... that's how I feel.

I am really being healed. ...Since there's no foolproof way on how to raise a child, I'm sure that troubles will occur here and there, however... as of now, I don't believe there will come a time where my feelings about this will cool off.

Advantageous and disadvantageous connections, strategy... not to mention in the conglomerate, but there is always these shadows in fief politics. The number one thing that the country uses during exchanges are the fiefs.

Because I am no gentleman with a high ranking, I never want others to say that I cannot see what's important and protect it. At times, there are things that must be cut down and I have to play the role of a demon, harden my heart, and cut those down. And things that can still be used must be used.

I must protect the people living in our fief, my precious parents, grandparents, people who are important to me and those who are willing to work with me, at all cost.

However, even if it's me, there are times when I get tired. Rather than my body, it's my heart and mind. What was it that I read in a book... Kings are always lonely.

Although I am not a King, the future of the people can change based on my final decision... No matter what, it is my responsibility.

When I think about those things, as I thought, it is heavy.

Because I decided to undertake this on my own, I will do everything I am capable of doing... That being said, I will also grow old eventually, and it will be impossible for me to continue then, thus I must find someone suitable to replace me.

When that time comes, I thought I will live quietly surrounded by

children... Oh my, I wonder if I was being too impatient.

Well, in order to achieve a peaceful future, I must work at it right now.

It has been half a year since grandfather departed from the Duke of Armelia's fief. Berne and the Second Prince has successfully graduated from school.

Right now, Berne is studying under father. The rest of the group are also studying under their individual parents. This means that Ed-sama is also studying his duties in the castle. He has yet to be officially married to Yuri-sama. As to when it will happen, they have yet to make an announcement, but it will probably be soon.

\*

After I returned home, I immediately headed to the study. First, I will take a look at documents concerning the conglomerate, and the fief government afterward.

"Welcome home, young mistress."

With that timing, the person who entered was Dean. After I collapsed that time, I stopped leisurely going out to town with just Dean and I. Our day offs are on a separate day, in case something happens, we'll be able to support each other.

"I'm back, Dean. Although it's sudden, please give me a report."

"Yes. ...As expected, the import and export have increased after the ease on the taxes. In addition, it looks like the profits of the conglomerates and companies have increased."

Since that time, we switched from poll taxes to income taxes to lessen the taxes needed to be paid. Although there was a lot of confusion when it was still at its introductory stage, it has settled down little by little.

Now then, just to recap where the Duke of Armelia's fief is, it is southeast of the Royal City, and the area it covers is quite large. The climate is eternal spring... and a part of the south is tropical. The east faces the sea, and there are some ports there.

I believe that the Duke of Armelia's fief is blessed with a good location. The climate is warm, and there is a port town. There is a sea that separates other countries from it, although there's a risk during war-time, but right now, it brings in large profits.

In addition, northwest of the Royal City, without a body of water to separate the land, lies the Kingdom which is famous for warfare, the Towair Kingdom. Thus, compared to that place, this is better.

Returning to the story, there is a port town in our fief, and because of that, trade is taking place there more than ever. When I had just received the position of being the fief Lord's proxy, I went to investigate the east where the tax revenue is large, and the reason was because of the port town.

Presently, because of the ease of taxes, trade with other countries has increased. With the previous taxes, not only were the people in the fief not doing enough trade with other countries, they suffered from trading with other towns within the fief. The taxes on exportation has been abolished and decreased the taxes on import. In the future, we will do an occasional tax rate review based on the product item.

In any case, because the taxes has lessened, the quantity of the import and export goods coming and going to other fief and countries as increased.

Because of that, with the conglomerates and companies are gaining more profits based on the goods they handle, next would be the income tax of the conglomerates... We will be separating the income taxes of the conglomerates and their presidents... Well, that's something I'm looking forward to.

...Azura Conglomerate has also started to import and export to other countries, so our profits are increasing little by little.

Now then, when the distribution increased, I discovered something interesting. That is silk.

In my previous world, if I'm not mistaken, silk was introduced in Europe during the Middle Ages\*, and it was popular among the upper class... But

for some reason, there is still no silk in this Kingdom.

[T/N: Middle Ages span from 5th to 15th centuries. Silk was introduced to Europe, Italy, in the 13th century after the Second Crusades. For more information, please search for “Silk Road.”]

The mainstream here is linen, wool, and cotton. I found it interesting that although cotton has been distribution, silk, on the other hand, is not available... That’s what I first thought, but when trade had increased, I recently discovered it.

Although I do know that farming silkworms are one way to produce them, and I want the Armelia fief to make it a locality, but honestly, I do not know what silk is made out of and the process of making it so it will require a large amount of time. Because of that, when the tax revenue of the fief has settled down, let’s do some trial and error sometime in the future to make.

\*

### Translator’s Message

Cat was caught in the clutches of the younger sister’s evil friend who just happened to like reading Duke’s Daughter and was bribed with two boxes of White Chocolate Macadamia Nut Cookies.

That said, let’s start Volume 2 with a bang, shall we? There will be a total of 5 chapters today. And no, my fingers didn’t slip from the number 2 on my number keypad. Hehehe.

Also, I would like to take this time to thank the people who donated to the Japan Relief Fund and requested for Duke’s Daughter. These chapters are for you guys!

Thank you to: Kirindas, JC, CU, PW, HL, MK, TD, and other people who wish to remain Anonymous. Thank you for your generosity.



# Chapter 33: Now, to the Royal City

“...Why was something like this sent to me...”

The thing I presently held in my hand was an invitation. ...It is an invitation to a party held in the Royal Castle to celebrate the founding of the Kingdom.

Because it is an official event, it is usually attended by everyone, especially those who are making a debut. That's right, if it is the usual.

However, I have been banished from society, and ever since I have been expelled from the academy, I have never received an invitation. Nevertheless, that is only natural, or rather, it is bizarre for me to even receive one.

“...However, young mistress. The invitation to this party came from the royal family. You cannot turn it down so bluntly.”

Although Sebastian said that, he was also looking at the invitation with suspicious eyes.

“You're right. ...I should prepare myself for the worst.”

“You don't have to worry about the fief. It's just nice that Dean will be here, and if anything happens, I will immediately dispatch a messenger.”

“Yes. Sebastian, I'm counting on you.”

\*

Several days after that, I left the fief for the first time in a long while and headed towards the house in the Royal City. It's been almost three years since I left the Royal City, and because it's has been so long, I don't have any deep impressions of it.

“Welcome home, young mistress.”

All the servants gathered and greeted me at the same time. And the person at the very front was the head maid, Rimé.

“It's been a long time, Rimé”

“Yes. To finally be able to meet the young mistress again, there is no greater joy than this.”

“You’re being too exaggerated.”

Then, I walked passed the servants who had lined up and headed further inside.

“...It’s been a long time.”

“Welcome home, Iris-chan.”

Inside, my parents and my younger brother were waiting.

“It’s been a long time. Father, mother, Berne.”

“Above all, it’s good that you’re in good health. It’ll be good if you spend your time here leisurely.”

My normally strict father unexpectedly displayed a soft expression. With just that alone, I felt slightly pleased.

“Yes, please allow me to do so.”

“More than anything, I heard from Sei that there will be another new product? I’m looking forward to it.”

“The preparation to commercialize it is not yet completed. However, I will be doing a trial run of the product during the upcoming party, so please look forward to it.”

“Weellll~ Later please show it to me in secret? Can you?”

“Please look forward to seeing it tomorrow.”

When I said that, she sported a slightly disappointed expression and consented anyway.

“Older sister... Will you really be attending tomorrow’s party?”

“It can’t be helped. Since I received an invitation from the royal family.”

“...However, Ed-sama and Yuri-sama will be attending for sure.”

I was surprised when I heard Berne’s words, and my eyes unintentionally widened in wonder.

“...I was surprised.”

“About what?”

“The fact that you’re actually worrying about me.”

After I said what I was thinking, Berne’s face darkens a little.

“That is... It is certainly normal for you to think that it’s a little late for me to worry about you, but...”

“Not at all. Thank you.”

After that, I went to my room to relax. The last time I was here, I was really nervous thinking about how my negotiations with father will turn out, and after the meeting with him, I was so busy with various preparations that I do not have much memory of this room. That’s why it feels a little nostalgic.

While I was relaxing like that, Rimé came to the room.

“...Young mistress, the Master is calling for you.”

“Hmmm, father is... I will go to him immediately.”

When I entered the room, father was sitting on a chair surrounded by lots of documents. ...Somehow, I see my own appearance in him.

“...So you came.”

“Yes. Please excuse me.”

“...It seems like the fief has been doing well lately.”

“It’s doing passably.”

“Don’t be too modest. ...Well, I guess that’s fine. That aside, I’m really sorry about this time.”

“When you said ‘this time,’ are you talking about the party?”

“Yeah. Although Melly and I tried to investigate it... the insiders insisted that the invitation came from a member of the royal family.”

“I wonder what they are intending in making me attend? It’s not as though there’s any merit.”

“Or rather, it’s because it will be difficult for you. The aristocrats will be strict on someone who has once been banished from society.”

“Well, if it’s about that, I’ve already prepared myself. It is a situation which I cannot run away from, so there’s no helping it.”

“On that appointed day, there’s a high chance that the King will not make an appearance.”

“Although it’s the party to celebrate the founding of the Kingdom, the King might not attend? Did something happen?”

I mean, it’s the party to celebrate the founding of the Kingdom, right? So unless something compelling happened, the King will definitely be there.

“...About half a year ago, the King collapsed.”

“No way...”

After feeling like I was hit by a massive weight, I instinctively heaved a sigh. With this timing, and for the King to be absent. No matter how one looks at it, the chaos in this Kingdom will intensify.

“Although he collapsed, I can’t say that his illness was serious. However, as of now, if one just looks at him, one can immediately tell that his health is gradually deteriorating. The party tomorrow will most likely be the trigger to set this Kingdom off.”

Well, that’s probably how it’ll be. If the King is absent, no matter who it is, they’ll find it suspicious. And in no time at all, rumors will start to spread.

“Since that is the case, a daughter of a Duke will probably become one of the main topics. During tomorrow’s party, my existence will probably be in the limelight. As for me, I really want to quickly return to the fief and resume my normal life.”

“Ah, that’s right...”

“Father, although you probably have a lot of work left to do before tomorrow’s party, but please take care of your body.”

“You as well. I also heard about. Didn’t you already collapse once?”

“Only for one day. But after that, I’ve always remembered to relax.”

“Is that so. When it comes to work, the body is the basis. ...You as well, make sure you don’t overwork yourself.”

“Yes. Thank you very much.”

\*

...The next day, because the weather was beautiful, I decided to do yoga in the garden. Although it seems like Tanya has given up on the idea of asking me to stop wearing linen T-shirts and tights early in the morning, she probably didn’t think that I would wear it outside. And when she saw me, she panicked.

...I’m so sorry, Tanya. However, it is warm in the Royal City, and the weather is fine, so I instinctively did it.

Mother found with at the same time as Tanya. When she saw me, she seemed to have gotten interested in yoga and made me promise to teach her tomorrow morning.

Since the party will take place tonight, I should probably start making my preparations.

I took a shower and began my preparation. After I got dressed with help from Tanya, she also took responsibility to do my hair and make-up.

By the way... The trial product, this time, is a dress. This dress has been tailored with the recently discovered silk. As expected, silk... has splendid luster. Earlier, Tanya was also looking at the dress absentmindedly.

...Now then, preparation is perfect. Spirit is also adequate. Thus, shall we head off to the battlefield?

\*

### Translator’s Message

The King has collapsed, and I’m guessing Iris’ father thinks that she will be used as a diversion?

# Chapter 34: A Certain Aristocrat's Observation

...Today is the founding day, and all the aristocrats will gather at the Royal Castle for a party held by the royal family. As the head of an Earl's House, I've also been invited to this party.

Every single person who entered the venue were dressed beautifully, following the dress code of an official function. Of course, I, as well, was dressed in clothing I had specially tailored for this occasion.

Suddenly, the hall became noisy. ...It seems that Edward-sama, Yuri-sama, and the son of the Pope of the Darryl church, Van-sama, has arrived.

Edward-sama came dressed in a splendidly deep green suit. Next to him... Yuri-sama, who entered the hall with her hand linked with Edward-sama, is wearing a pink dress. With flowers sewed on the upper portion of her dress here and there, it splendidly enhances her youthfulness.

Her skirt puffs up like a pannier skirt, with a slit on the side. There were also white lace and something pale pink underneath it, and one could catch a glimpse of them whenever she moves.

Van-sama on the other hand, as someone part of the Darryl church, was wearing Darryl church's formal dress.

When they appeared, the people in the hall went to them in order to greet them one after another. Because a member of the royal family showed up, it was only natural.

...However, there were also people who just watched them from afar. Their actions are acceptable due to the present unstable situation. For the time being, I did not go to greet him either, but if he comes near me, I'll greet him then.

Even so... Edward-sama didn't come here as a sponsor but as an attendant. Surely, even though he has yet to ascend the throne, he has been pressured to do so by Ellia-sama and her House. Well, since the

person in question is conversing with Yuri-sama normally, he might not mind it at all.

While I was thinking that, the surrounding became as rowdy as the time Edward-sama made his appearance. The people who arrived is the Duke of Armelia and the Prime Minister, Louis-sama, and his wife, Mellice-sama.

As usual, Mellice-sama looks beautiful. Today, she was dressed in the height of fashion, matching her light blue eyes... a dark blue gown. Really, as expected of someone who was given the title of "The Flower of Society," she is beautiful.

Regardless if it was a man or a woman, they went to greet the couple. The two of them were most likely already used to it and tactfully returned the greetings.

Soon after, the surrounding of the entrance of the hall became even more rowdy. I, as well, directed my line of sight away from the Duke and Duchess.

At that place, was the Duke's son, Berne Tash Armelia, and the girl he was escorting. That girl attracted the eyes of all the people in the hall. Similarly, I was also one of the people who was admiring her.

...Beautiful. That word occupied my entire head. She had silver glossy hair that seems to shine even more under the light. She has well sculpted facial features, and skin as white as porcelain. With deep blue eyes, similar to the finest sapphire.

And the dress she was wearing was glossy in addition to having some kind of luster... I wonder what kind of cloth it's made out of. At the very least, I have never seen such fabric before.

And that thin beige dress tailored from that kind of fabric, is a dress completely of a different style from all the dresses found in this place. First of all, the dress has no puffy sleeves, and rather than being in a form of an hourglass, it is shaped with like a curved line similar to the letter "S"... In addition, rather than having a skirt with volume, it has a refreshing looking narrow skirt.

With her slender figure, the dress suited her really well. And the skirt was finished with an elaborate embroidery done with blue and silver thread. And to polish her look, she had a deep blue sash, similar to the color of her eyes.

She seems to illuminate under the lights, and with her delicate frame... she looked like the Goddess of the Moon. Holding that sort of impression, I couldn't separate my eyes from her.

...Exactly who in the world is that girl? Such a beautiful woman, I would never forget her after seeing her once.

While bathing in the eyes of the people in the hall, she walked deep into the hall. And then, she stopped right in front of the Duke and Duchess of Armelia and started a conversation.

...Is she someone from the Duke of Armelia's House...? Now that I think about it, her appearance looks really similar to Mellice-sama...

Impossible, is she really Iris Lana Armelia-sama, the daughter of Duke Armelia? No, the difference in appearance is too excessive... In addition, after her engagement with Edward-sama was annulled, she should not be able to attend any parties. If that's so, then...?

While I was thinking of that question inside my head, another door opened. The person who arrived was the Queen Dowager... Queen Dowager? Not the King but the Queen Dowager...? But at the time when the organizer made an appearance, I suddenly remembered something.

Before the King rose to the throne, she was once the Queen who dominated this Kingdom. This was because when her elder brother, the Crown Prince, died, she became the only direct descendant of the royal family. However, because it was unprecedented for a woman to take the throne, she married a Duke and had him assume the role of the King.

During that era, rather than the King, it was the Queen who appeared time and time again and acted as the organizer. Therefore, I feel nostalgic looking at the current spectacle.

When the previous King, her husband, passed away and her son, the



present King, rose to the throne, and she quickly backed away.

And when the King married and the Earl's daughter, the Queen then became the Queen Dowager and retired to the Queen Dowager's palace.

Since then, she hasn't been participating much in these kinds of events... Really, I wonder if something happened.

Naturally, there were others who remembered the past and lowered their heads. I was also one of those people.

She accepted our greetings with a smile and sat at the seat reserved for the royal family. At the same time, the music started playing and the party began.

For some reason, the Queen Dowager was looking at the mystery woman Berne-sama brought, who was currently engrossed in a conversation.

Suddenly, the mysterious woman began to move. Apparently, she was called by the Queen Dowager. When she was in the vicinity of where the Queen Dowager was sitting, all of us had already forgotten our own conversations and perked our ears to listen to theirs.

"The Duke of Armelia's daughter, Iris Lana Armelia. I have been looking forward to the day I finally meet you. And thus, I have invited you to today's party."

When we heard the Queen Dowager's words, a shock ran through us. As I thought, she was the eldest child of the Duke of Armelia, "the woman" involved in that event...

To think that it was the Queen Dowager who had personally invited her, we couldn't hide our surprise.

What in the world was the Queen Dowager thinking about...

"You have achieved spectacular success as the President of Azura Conglomerate, and I've also heard about the splendid work you have done in managing the fief as the fief Lord's proxy. I hope you enjoy yourself today."

When the Queen Dowager said those words, all of us received an even

greater blow.

She was the person who is operating “that” Azura Conglomerate? In addition, she was managing the fief as the fief Lord’s proxy!

Speaking of Azura Conglomerate, it is a popular conglomerate in the Kingdom, large enough to fight over the first or second spot.

Although it has only been recently established, not even three years old... nevertheless, with conglomerate’s excellent management and unprecedented product line-up, they quickly gained attention. Their chocolate products is a great favorite of mine, and my family is using their beauty products.

“...If you’re troubled with anything, please feel free to consult with me, anything is fine.”

“...It is my great honor.”

With beautiful movements, she expressed her gratitude and withdrew. Although only three to four sentences were said during the conversation, because the organizer must talk with various other people, this was only natural.

When she withdrew, the next person was called.

She once again returned to being a wallflower. The person probably wanted to remain inconspicuous... however, everyone was glancing at her.

With just that exchange alone, everyone was aware that her value had become immeasurable.

First of all, her appeal of being the President of Azura Conglomerate. With ample funds and assets, she is an existence that can’t be ignored.

However, above all... she has the support of the Queen Dowager. She was summoned by the noblest of all nobles in the Kingdom, and she was asked to consult with the Queen Dowager about any matter. The royal family... to receive the backing of the person with the most influence in a place like this is an honor.

Now that it has come to this, why did Edward-sama annulled his

engagement with her... After all, with her beautiful appearance, talent, lineage, and backing... No matter how one looks at it, she's attractive.

Or rather, if he really wants to ascend the throne, she is someone he would want to draw in. To actually ignore the lady, annulled his engagement with her, and immediately get engaged to another girl, if anything, it was too malicious.

At the very least, the neutral people will sneer in secret while the First Prince faction will probably gloat about this. And the people in the Second Prince's faction, after having let go of such a big fish, I guess they would probably end up gritting their teeth.

Right now, everyone wants to get acquainted with her and were looking for the perfect timing to do so. However, she is always in a conversation with one of her family members, and because of that, it's hard to find the right timing.

"Huh, it's been a long time, hasn't it~"

While the others were thinking of strategies, a girl who couldn't read the atmosphere made such remarks.

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### Translator's Message

Second Prince's faction, continue to grit your teeth in regret! But before you do, let me grab some popcorn~

Can you guys guess who's the girl who can't read the atmosphere?

# Chapter 35: Assistance of the Queen Dowager

Right now, I am in the middle of a mayhem.

...It is currently the party to commemorate the founding of the Kingdom. I thought it was strange for me to be invited, and when I arrived at the venue, I resolved myself and entered the place.

However, when I entered, rather than receiving cold gazes from the people, they looked at me with curiosity and interest. At this time, I thought, “Huh? It is different from what I had been expecting...”

And when I received a summon from the Queen Dowager, I didn’t think that she would say kind words and give me her support. Huh? Could it be that the person who invited me was the Queen Dowager... that’s what I believed.

Since my mission for today has ended, I heaved a sigh and calmly walked to a corner.

However, I didn’t think that Yuri-sama would appear right in front of me. ...In addition, standing next to her was the grumpy looking Ed-sama, and Van-sama who was looking at me curiously.

“...It’s been a long time.”

For the time being, I replied with a smile. ...It doesn’t look stiff, does it?

“Iris-sama, it’s been a long time since you have not attended the academy~ I’m glad to see that you’re looking energetic~”

Huh, sarcasm? Was that sarcasm? Or is she simply saying that because she’s worried about me? Since the opponent is Yuri-sama, I hesitate to make any judgment...

“It is a good thing that Yuri-sama is also looking well.”

For the time being, I made a harmless remark.

“...I’m surprised. To think that it’s actually Iris-sama.”

Van-sama who was standing on the side made a comment.

“Didn’t I tell you so? I’m really good at distinguishing a person’s face. In addition, she’s together with Berne, so I thought she’s definitely Iris-sama.”

Yuri-sama said proudly... even though she was at that place when it all happened. Together with Berne, you were there driving me out with all your might!

Even so, you’ve changed too much. I didn’t notice at all.”

“Yuri is really smart.”

“Fufufu... Thank you very much, Edward-sama.”

....Yes, yes. As usual, you guys are surrounded with “kyakya ufufufu” pink atmosphere. To actually act that way in front of your previous fiancée, you really lack consideration.

On the other hand, I’ve already given up a lot of things to Yuri-sama... Besides, I wonder if Edward-sama has always been this happy? While I was wondering that, a doubt immediately arose within me after remembering the last words I said at the academy.

“...By the way, why is Iris-sama making an appearance here today~?”

I didn’t expect a sudden punch from Yuri-sama, and within a moment, the smile on my face disappeared.

“Why, you ask...?”

“Because Iris-sama...”

“There’s no need for you to ask her why she’s asking you that question. Because you do not have any position to make an appearance at this place.”

Interrupting what Yuri-sama was saying, Edward-sama said while looking at me with hatred. Even if you don’t glare at me that much, it’s not as though I would eat her.

“No position...”

“It’s because Yuri is gentle. She’s giving you a piece of advice to remind you of your position.”

Or rather, listen to the other person’s story first! In addition, why are you being so boastful?

“...Advice?”

On the other hand, Yuri-sama doesn’t seem to understand what Ed-sama said and a question mark appeared on top of her head.

“...The reason I am in this place is because I received an invitation from the Queen Dowager. With or without any position, it is my duty, as a subject, to play my part.”

“Wha...! Grandmother did...?”

Ed-sama looked really surprised and his eyes widened. Were you not paying any attention when I went to greet the Queen Dowager a little while ago?

“No, that’s impossible... To someone as inhumane as you, there’s no way grandmother will send you an invitation. If you want to tell a lie, make it a little more believable.”

Although you are not convinced... those words are not something you should say to someone who you were once engaged with... When I was about to say something, Yuri-sama said something before me.

“...Umm~ What have you two people been talking about? I don’t really understand it~...”

“...Haaa...”

With Yuri-sama’s words, his anger immediately lessened. You don’t understand it well? It was you who brought up this topic in the first place.

“About the thing I wanted to ask~... Why Iris-sama came here in person... Is it because Iris-sama wants to advertise that dress today~ At least that’s what I was thinking~”

“...Advertisement?”

“Yes~ Because Iris-sama is someone from the Duke of Armelia’s House, right? If you think about the Duke of Armelia’s fief, then Azura Conglomerate will naturally come to mind. What I wanted to hear is if Iris-sama was asked by the Azura Conglomerate to wear that dress and come here to advertise.”

I wasn’t asked to do it or anything, after all, I am the President of Azura Conglomerate. As I thought, they didn’t know that I am the president of that conglomerate... Then, I remembered the chaos that occurred when I was talking to Sei and was told that these two people wanted to apply to become members.

“No... I wasn’t asked to advertise it or anything... but it is the truth that fabric used for this dress will be introduced as a new commodity.”

“Oh, as I thought~! It’s really beautiful. I would also want to have a dress tailored in this fabric. Where can I buy it?”

Leaving Ed-sama aside, Yuri-sama advances her conversation with me.

“Because we have yet to gather a lot of materials, it is currently not up for sale. But we’ll have enough materials soon enough, and a product line will be launched soon after.”

“Oh, is that so~ Because it looks really wonderful, I want one by all means... That’s what I was thinking. Is there anything you can do?”

“Although I am glad about your praise... however, we really do need more time, so pardon us.”

After all, it is being exported from another country, so the price is quite high. I thought that it can’t be helped since it’s silk, but thinking about the costs such as transportation, there’s a deficit.

Because of that, it doesn’t look like the conglomerate will be able to market it on a large scale... Even if we were to sell it at a high price, there’s not enough fabric. This time, I only made this dress because it was necessary.

“Eh~... But...”

“Th-that’s right. Yuri who will soon become a member of the royal family wishes it. It will be an honor for the conglomerate, and it’s their duty to immediately fulfill it.”

“Even if you say so, what’s impossible is impossible.”

“I-impenitent...!”

Ed-sama said with his face bright red. Fortunately, most people didn’t seem to hear our conversation because they were involved in conversations of their own, and also thanks to the music orchestral playing... Nevertheless, the people who were just nearby heard everything. Ah, how troublesome.

“...It’s really rowdy, isn’t it. What is going on?”

Mother suddenly appeared behind me.

“Ah, Duchess of Armelia. It’s been a long time~”

“...”

Splendidly ignoring Yuri-sama’s greeting, she walked towards me.

“Are you alright?”

“Eh... I’m doing fine, mother. To cause such a racket, I’m really sorry to worry you.”

“Duchess of Armelia!”

With the same tone as earlier, Ed-sama called out to my mother. Ah, a wrinkle suddenly appeared in the middle of mother’s forehead.

“Oh, Your Highness. Why are you speaking in such a loud voice in the middle of a party?”

“Under this circumstances... Why did you disregard Yuri! This is a blasphemy against the royal family.”

“Well, Your Highness. Surely you jest. ...I’m certain you haven’t forgotten the manners of the court, have you?”

Mother unfolded her fan and covered her mouth with it. On the other side of her fan, I’m sure she’s blowing a big sigh.



“For a person who has a lower social position to carefreely address a person of higher social standing, the people in the surrounding will question the fineness of that person. If Yuri-sama is to become your princess... No, because of this reason, she should be well informed of such manners.”

Mother quietly looked at Ed-sama and Yuri-sama's appearance.

“However, Yuri is the person who is engaged to me.”

“Yes, that she is. Although she's someone you are engaged to, it doesn't mean you have been formally married... In other words, she is not part of your House. Until then, her position will stay the same. ...Before you get married, no one knows what will happen until then.”

Mother suddenly glanced towards me. Yes, that's right. It is the truth that I had my engagement annulled.

“I don't think social status is related. When someone greets you, you should return the greeting. Isn't this the most natural thing to do~?”

“ ... ”

Mother and I... No, everyone in the surroundings was dumbfounded. No, Ed-sama and Van-sama were not stunned at all.

A natural thing... to do. To say such things in a world of aristocrats where manners and formalities are essential is a serious offense. With the King on the top, the rest of the aristocrats are under him in a shape of a pyramid.

In Japan, it is proprietary to greet people and return the greeting of someone else. However, there are various ways and manners to greet and return a greeting, and that identically exists in this world.

“Yuri-sama. As someone who might become a member of the royal family, you need to learn how to conduct yourself.”

“It is as Mellice says.”

I thought that a new person is making an appearance, I didn't think that it would be the Queen Dowager.

“Grandmother...!?”

“Queen Dowager, is it fine for you to leave your seat and come here?”

While Ed-sama was surprised that she made an appearance, mother, on the other hand, inquired nonchalantly.

“It’s fine. The greetings have pretty much ended. That said, Iris. Let’s go over there, and please let me hear the story of what you have been up to recently. Mellice, will you be coming as well?”

“Yes, I will come.”

“Is that so. The Duke of Armelia and the Marquis of Anderson are already there waiting for you. Please be my conversational partner.”

“Certainly.”

“Since you’ll be the only one left here, Berne, come with us to where the Duke of Armelia is.”

“Yes.”

When we were about to take our leave, Ed-sama once again called out.

“Grandmother...!”

“What is it? You’re being too rowdy. ...In this party, there are also people from other countries in attendance, so what’s with your awful state. You people, retire and cool your heads. Because with your appearance, the fineness of our Kingdom will be questioned.”

However, the Queen Dowager treated him coldly, and walked away, leading the four of us. The passing attendees looked at the expression on the faces of Ed-sama and the others... However, Ed-sama and Yuri-sama stood there with a blank surprise.

After that, the Queen Dowager returned to the seat reserved for the royal family. The people around her were people with high social status and distinguished guests from other countries, such as grandfather who is considered this Kingdom’s strongest military general, and important key figures involved in the Royal Court, and this impressive gathering of eminent and powerful members were smiling and laughing.

For these members to attend this party held by the Queen Dowager shows that even until now, the Queen Dowager's influence is still as powerful as ever.

I wonder if it's good that I came... that's what I was thinking. Because I didn't want to be at that place, I quietly stayed beside the Queen Dowager and conversed with her.

\*

Translator's Message

Popcorns are yummy, you guys should get some.

All hail Mellice! All hail the Queen Dowager!

## Chapter 36: Various Speculations (2)

“...I guess his status has dropped.”

I spoke of the details of the party that happened the other day with Alfred who is currently in front of me. However, because it's been a long time since I made an appearance at a party, I was really tired.

“If Ellia and her maternal house also made a move, I think it would have been more interesting. However, Ellia was busy greeting other aristocrats... She was too absorbed, frantically greeting and soliciting them to increase their influence that she didn't notice. It's the same with the Marquis' House.”

Alfred nodded looking satisfied.

“It's not good to be too greedy. Since people from other countries were in attendance, it's not advantageous to show that our Kingdom is in chaos. Still, it has reduced the influence of the Second Prince's faction... and tipped the balance of the neutral members' opinions. As expected of you, grandmother.”

“I didn't do anything at all. If I have to say something, it was Edward who caused his own self-destruction... is probably the best way to explain it. At any rate, has that child always been so thoughtless?”

“Who knows... From the very start, he has always been egotistical. If one is to describe his current state, it will be “If he loses his stopper, he will rampage,” or somewhere along those lines.”

Hearing Alfred's description... I thought it was accurate and nodded my head. It was a perfectly fitting phrase.

“So what you're saying is that the stopper, that Baron's daughter... must be taken away. How was it? Since it's you, you have probably already investigated her.”

“Yes, of course. ...Ludy.”

“Yes.”

Ludy, who always stood on the side, reacted to Alfred's words and took a step forward.

"When we investigated the girl, we found out that she is the illegitimate child of the head of the House of Noir. His partner was a housemaid who was serving in the Royal Castle.

After that, the maid resigned from her position and entered the Noir House. Then, she gave birth to a daughter, Yuri, she left the Noir Baron House and went into seclusion.

Baron Noir seemed like he looked for her whereabouts, but he was not able to find her for the past dozen years, and it wasn't until the year before the girl enrolled at the academy that she was found."

Until she was found, I wonder if she has been living in the streets? Even so, to actually look for her without any result for over a dozen years, exactly how large of an importance did the Baron place on her existence...?

"Is that so... Are there any other information?"

"I am really sorry. There is no other information right now."

"I understand. Please continue your investigation on her."

"Certainly."

"...That said, it would be advantageous for you to have that stopper removed."

"...Well, I wonder what it is you're implying."

When I asked, Alfred played dumb and smiled. Really, he absolutely doesn't want to reveal his intentions.

"However, because of this matter, there are those who would definitely side Second Prince faction thinking... "Since he doesn't have a good head on his shoulders, he should be easy to manipulate." and thus joined delightedly. As for the people who are on our side, they were probably pleased to see Edward showing such an appearance. Therefore, it's presumably very convenient for you, right?"

“...Well, I won’t disagree that it will not be a disadvantage to me if he becomes a good bait.”

Although Alfred said while smiling wryly, I, too, agreed with him. The people at the top should protect the common people... As of now, there aren’t many aristocrat Houses with prided themselves in doing that.

Or rather, they do things for the prosperity of their own Houses... To be prideful of their social standings for their own self-satisfaction, and repeatedly use their influences for their personal greed. These kinds of people, they will probably also try to make use of the royal family.

...Since it’s like that, Edward will not be a good ruler. After all, if I have to point out something, he gives the impression that he would do whatever he likes.

After all, there might be another side who would want to make use of that child. ...Even more so because Alfred has yet to show himself.

Alfred hasn’t taken the center stage for more than ten years. Even though he attended the academy for noble children, he graduated from the academy without using the royal family’s name. There are probably not a lot of people who remembers him when he was younger.

The First Prince whose name is not even well known, and the Second Prince who can be used... That’s probably what some people are thinking.

However, on the contrary, it is a chance to completely eradicate those people. As long as that child continues to act the same way as he did in yesterday’s party.

“...And so? Have you already made plans on what you intend to do in the future?”

“ ... ”

Although I tried asking, as I expected, he remained silent. The only thing he did was smiled. Really, although he is my own grandson, I cannot read his emotions.

“Well, it’s fine. Based on whatever it is you plan on doing, I will just go

along with it. No matter what it is you have planned, I'm sure that the results will be splendid."

As long as the daughter of the Baron, Yuri, is present, nothing can be expected of Edward. This is something I understood during the recent party.

When I think of the moment that child ascends the throne and obtains the power... The risks are too big. That being the case when I consider the future of this Kingdom... I can only entrust it to the person in front of me, Alfred. Even if Alfred ends up letting me down, he is still better than that child.

"...Which reminds me, I invited Iris to the recent party. She has grown up and became really beautiful."

When I said that, he reacted with a sudden but slight twitch. ...However, his face immediately returned to his previous smiling expression where one couldn't read what he's thinking.

"Grandmother. Why did you especially went out of your way to invite her?"

Although his the tone of his voice was a little sharp, I was happy. Because it means that he is considerably concerned in her affairs.

"Oh my, it's because I love girls who always does her best. Isn't it natural for me to want to meet her?"

When I started recalling it, I started to smile. She has similar facial features to Melly, and one can feel the same atmosphere the Duke of Armelia has surrounding her.

Fufufu... If Melly is a large rose, then Iris similar to a beautiful, upright and dignified lily. Her elegance is different, that's what I thought when I saw her.

"In addition, this is a positive thing for Iris, isn't it? I heard from Melly that she's been receiving invitations left and right."

"...Considering her quick-wittedness, there are no possibilities that

people will not approach her.”

“That might be so. Her background in business, achievements, appearance, and lineage... all of them are really attractive. Doesn't Alfred thinks so as well?”

“I think so, too.”

Alfred answered casually. Ahhh, really. Although I think it's fine if he let his expression loose a little more. While I was thinking so, when I quietly observed Alfred, I noticed that he looked a little troubled which cause me to deepen my smile.

“What is it? It seems like you want to ask something.”

“No? There's nothing in particular.”

In this kind of situation, it can't be helped if I want to make him more unsettled. Well, since I was able to shake Alfred a little, let's call this a win.

“Come to think of it, Alfred. In your eyes, what do you think of the House of the Duke of Armelia?”

“What exactly do you mean by that?”

“The government of their fief, and its structure. ...I don't have any ulterior motive.”

“If I were to put it in one word... it's 'interesting.' Various reforms are being made. If there's something I'm worried about, it's their growing military potential. In my opinion, one hundred years in the future, it won't be strange if the Duke of Armelia's House will become the most prosperous in the entire Kingdom.”

“As I thought, it's like that after all. It's not something to be happy about if one House has too much power. ...That said, for the development of the Kingdom, it is necessary for each fief to advance as well. Because of that, we must make an allowance on something that shouldn't exist.”

“Although you say that, since it's grandmother, it's not like you will do anything unkind towards their House. The fact that the Royal Guards



whose skills are the pride of the royal family are mostly from the Duke of Armelia's House, and that we continue to leave them alone is an excellent proof of that."

"Well, that's right. In addition, there is also that fact that the previous heads and current head of their family have been supporting the entire Kingdom as its Prime Minister... And compared to other nobles, they are the definition of an aristocrat who behave like proper aristocrats and contribute to the Kingdom... Especially with the current situation, they haven't done anything particularly rebellious."

Not only is the Duke of Armelia doing a good job being the Kingdom's Prime Minister, their House also makes contributions towards the royal family. Rather than chipping the power and influence of that House, it makes one more confident that that House is powerful.

In addition, I also heard some of their standpoints. They are gradually giving their support to Alfred to become the next King. Because of various situations, Edward has gotten himself into a difficult position with the Prime Minister. Although I have been retired up until recently, I'm being made to work. Just like once upon a time... because of that guy.

"...Well then, grandmother. Please excuse me, I must get going now."

When the conversation ended, Alfred bowed towards me and left.

# Chapter 37: Activities in the Royal City

Ah, how nostalgic... For a while, I looked at the scenery of the Royal City in comparison to the fief and became absorbed in it. Compared to the day-to-day life in the fief, living in the Royal City felt like a raging wave.

That is because of what happened ten days ago...

“Oh my, it does seem that a lot of invitations has arrived.”

After the party to commemorate the founding of the Kingdom, we decided to spend a day to relax at home and drink tea. Although my body doesn't feel that tired, my mind did. At that time, while I was drinking tea with mother, one of the butlers serving our house came to deliver invitations sent to our House.

“Earl Monroe and Marquis Rudolf are associates of Ellia's maternal House... So there's no way I would go.”

“The invitations are not just for Her Grace, but there are invitations for the young mistress as well.”

“I'm not understanding the meaning more and more. Well... after looking at what happened at that party, I can understand why they would want to make an acquaintance. Iris-chan, do you want to go?”

“No way... I certainly never had a thought of going.”

For me to attend a tea party held in the Houses of one of the Second Prince's faction? I will absolutely refuse to go. In the first place, there's no point in trying to deepen the association now.

“I thought so as well.”

Mother blew out a sigh and continued drinking tea.

“Oh, are there any other Houses that you would like to go to?”

“...The House of Marquis Langley.”

“The House of Marquis Langley? Ah, if I'm not mistaken, the daughter of that House was one of Iris-chan's classmates.”

“Yes. We got acquainted while I was still in the academy.”

Mimosa – I wonder how she’s doing...? Although we’ve been exchanging letters from time to time, it’s been more than two years since we last met.

“If that’s the case, then we’ll go to Marquis Langley’s House. Besides that, is there any other Houses you would like to go to?”

“Hmm, which Houses does mother think will be fine to go to?”

Apart from the Houses part of the Second Prince’s faction, there are numerous other invitations. However, because I didn’t leave the fief for so long, I am not well informed regarding most of the Houses.

However, since I got the opportunity to make some connections... I would also like to take the time to get acquainted with some of them. Because of that, “which House” to go to becomes really important.

Because I don’t have much time... I need to be efficient. In order to decide on which Houses would be best to make acquaintances with, I consulted with mother.

“I guess Baron Messi’s House would be good. After that, the Earl of Dranbalt’s House.”

“The Earl of Dranbalt’s House, if I’m not mistaken, mother and that House’s Countess has a deep friendship?”

From the corner of my memory, I remembered mother going to the Dranbalt’s House a lot.

“Yes. The Countess has really good sense, and it’s very interesting to talk to her.”

“Since it’s mother who is saying that, it’s quite a compliment.”

“Thank you. ...In addition, Dranbalt’s House is part of the neutral faction, so when they hold a tea party, the majority of the people invited are also neutral members. If Iris-chan wants to learn about the strife of the factions, won’t this be a perfect chance?”

As expected of mother... It was as if she read my mind, and because of that, I decided in my heart to attend the Dranbalt’s tea party.

“If Iris-chan will be going, I will go as well.”

“Let’s go together, mother. Then, is there something about Baron Messi’s House?”

“As for Baron Messi, he is one of the people who fought alongside father in the war against the Towair Kingdom. Knighthood was bestowed upon him because of his military exploits... However, the region he governs is adjacent to the Towair Kingdom, so even though it’s the season, he rarely leaves his fief in order to protect the border.”

“Baron Messi... Ah, you mean Mabaras-sama? I heard about him from grandfather once. If I’m not mistaken, he is a close friend of grandfather.”

“That’s right. And he is also known as the excellent right arm of father. You do know that in the past, father played an active role in the military unit during the war?”

“Yes. Of course, I know about it.”

At that time, there was an impasse... No, we were actually a little inferior, and the person who turned the tide and brought victory to the Tasmeria Kingdom was grandfather.

Because what had happened, grandfather was appointed as General, and even until now, he is respected by the Knights and Military personnel.

...And when I wanted to hear about the old times from grandfather, if I remember correctly, he stayed silent while looking embarrassed.

“That’s right. Because the history books omitted the a lot of details, not a lot was said about what happened in the vicinity. Nevertheless, because of what had happened, it led to Mabaras-sama being rewarded with Knighthood...”

“Certainly, since it’s like that, it would be best for me to meet him at least once.”

This is a rare opportunity... Since that’s the case, I should meet him at least once.

“Yes. In addition, Baron Messi is part of the First Prince faction,

naturally, most of the people who will attend are part of the First Prince faction.”

“If that’s the case, there is more of a reason for me to go.”

“That’s how it is. ...Earl Monroe holds entertainments all the time, but it would be more constructive for him to be more like Baron Messi who is usually protecting the borders.”

“...Yeah...”

After listening to mother’s words, I immediately pulled up a map of Tasmeria Kingdom in my head. That reminds me, the House of Earl Monroe and Baron Messi’s fief are close to each other, which near the borders of our Kingdom and Towair Kingdom’s.

If I’m not mistaken, it was also the main battlefield during the war against the Towair Kingdom. Because that area is where the granary is, the war started by aiming for the crops.

The Towair Kingdom is further up north where the land is mostly damp. In comparison, our Kingdom is rich in crops and that’s the reason why they aimed for our Kingdom.

Most of our country has everlasting spring, we have a lot of fertile lands where crops can easily grow. The land governed by Earl Monroe is north of Tasmeria Kingdom, which has four seasons, but nevertheless, different crops can be produced.

“Does Earl Monroe’s fief covers a large area of land?”

“Yes, something like that. However, every year, even before the season begins, he’s staying in the Royal City. He attends parties here and there, and in return, he also holds considerable entertainments.”

“Is that so, but why...”

Especially since the location around his land is insecure. The war against the Towair Kingdom ended, but there was no signed truce agreement, so there is no ceasefire. That said, I am hopeless to help with the situation since that area is not where the fief I govern is. The only thing I can do is

keep it in mind and observe what happens.

“Let’s put that matter aside. This time, since Iris-chan doesn’t have much time, I thought it would be good, but what do you think?”

“Yes... As mother suggested, I will be attending the events of these three Houses.”

“Is that so. Then, let us send an answer immediately... and the closest event is...”

“It’s the event at Marquis Langley’s House. The event is the day after tomorrow. However, instead of calling it an entertainment, it’s more like a private event.”

We quickly gave our answer to the butler who was still waiting.

“Is that so. Then, Iris-chan. Let’s start our preparations tomorrow.”

“Yes, mother.”

Thus, this began my visitation of parties after a long time. ...That said, there was only three.

# Chapter 38: Reunion

Firstly, it was the visit to Marquis Langley's House.

Because it's a private event, I thought that I wouldn't feel nervous... But after thinking that it's been a long time since I met Mimosa, I started feeling nervous. After I have arrived in Marquis Langley's mansion, one of their servants led me to their drawing room.

"...It's been a long time. Iris-sama."

In the drawing room, Mimosa was already there sitting while waiting.

"Thank you very much for your invitation today."

I returned her greetings and sat down. With that timing, apart from one lady's maid, Mimosa asked all the servants to leave the room.

"...Let's stop the greetings here... Iris, it has really been such a long time. I'm glad to see you looking so spirited..."

I wonder what happened to that solemn atmosphere from earlier, she returned to her natural self. Mimosa Langley. She was my classmate in the academy and my best friend. As for her appearance, with slightly drooping eyes, she looks gentle and cute. Because my facial features look a little strict, there's a complete contrast between us.

"I'm sorry for worrying you, Mimosa..."

"Seriously. While I was resting because of a cold, I didn't think you would be expelled... That's why I kept telling you to be careful of those people."

Mimosa did warn me severely back then. 'Don't get too close to that daughter of a Baron, Yuri, and not be too concerned with her.' However, when I saw her getting close to Edward-sama, I tried to interfere and was faced with uncompromising retaliation as a result.

"I have reflected. At that time, I didn't think that the other side would plan so far ahead and retaliate to that extent."

"You're right. If it was the old them, I don't think they would even think

of going to that extent. However, when those people became associated with that child, they changed a lot.”

“Yes... Mimosa, you noticed it as well?”

“Isn’t it only you who did not notice because you were too crazily absorbed with Edward-sama? With just a glimpse, I saw it all. Hey, Iris... to be honest, I’m scared of that girl.”

“...Scared?”

Although I started to smile, but after seeing the serious expression on her face, I withdrew my smile. When I came face to face with her during the party, she looked like an innocent girl with the fascination of a child, so I didn’t really think about it.

“I’m scared because I cannot tell what she’s thinking at all. In addition, she seems really innocent under the guise of a child... But it doesn’t feel that way at all.

I mean, if you look at those people... Until those people met that child, they would act according to training they were given depending on their individual statuses, so do you think they would have behaved in such a way?

It is because they understood their own positions that they were more vigilant compared to others of people who might want to utilize them... Nevertheless, they immediately and readily fell into that child’s palm and moved in the way she wanted.

And because they themselves are not aware of the situation, it’s attributed to that child’s clever actions. Even their arrogant behaviors, I found it suspicious and wondered if there’s any meaning behind them.”

“...Are you not thinking about it too much? I mean, her actions and way of speaking might just be her natural self.”

In this situation, I find it difficult to think that it’s that child’s technique. That’s what I thought when I took things into consideration.

...That said, there is also that part of me who is in complete denial. One



of the reasons is because I felt uneasy is concerning the words Mimosa used to describe the Baron's daughter, Yuri, while she was still in the academy. The other reason is because I thought that the things she spoke of was too extreme... and I tried to drive it to the corner of my mind.

"...Is that so... Really, let's put a stop to this topic."

Although Mimosa didn't look convinced, she couldn't find any words to refute it, and seemed to have grudgingly agreed.

"Apart from that, Iris. How are you doing these days?"

After switching the topic, Mimosa returned to her natural calm self and asked. Mimosa is, how should I describe this... She is very feminine, and the atmosphere around her feel very maternal.

"...Even if you ask me how I've been... It's exactly as I have written in my letters. I guess you could say that... I've been busy managing the conglomerate, and up to my neck in the fief's politics."

"I want to hear all the details about it. Isn't it wonderful? You opened a large store here in the Royal City, and isn't the most popular cafe also part of Azura Conglomerate? Mother and I are a big fan of their beauty products, and I also love their confectioneries, especially the chocolates."

"Thank you very much for that."

"In addition, you became really beautiful... Did you do anything special?"

When I saw her looking at me with dreamy eyes and started laughing, I winced a little.

"I-I didn't really do anything special. I don't have that much free time. ... Mimosa, as well, what have you been doing lately?"

"I also haven't been doing much? ...After graduating from the academy, because I am not engaged to anyone, I have been staying in the Royal City and undergoing bridal preparations until I find a partner... That's how it was supposed to be, but with the current situation, I don't want to immediately find a partner... so I've been a little bored."

"Oh..."

Strangely, I completely understand. Especially the latter half. At this time, with the active struggle of the factions, since one won't know which side their partner might join, it's better to hold off than to make a bad marriage.

"Well, it's all good. Since I'm not at all ready for marriage either. It's a good chance to reflect upon myself."

If anything, I think Mimosa would have received a lot of offers for marriage... I thought it was a little regretful. But I'm sure it's not just Mimosa, a lot of Houses part of the neutral faction are finding it hard to find a partner.

Going with the flow, I started drinking tea, but my hand holding the cup suddenly stopped. Together with some scones and sandwiches, there was a familiar chocolate engraved with a lily.

"I'm sorry about this, Iris. Although it's one of your store's product... as I've said earlier, it's one of my favorites."

"There's no need for you to apologize. I'm really glad you like it that much. That reminds me, I plan to inspect the stores here in the Royal City... Would Mimosa like to come along?"

"Could you be talking about the store of Azura Conglomerate?"

Mimosa's eyes started to sparkle.

"Because I plan to visit the affiliated stores as well, it might be a little tough. After all, I have some time left here in the Royal City... So I was thinking of taking this opportunity to see the state of the stores. Of course, because it's an inspection, although there would be a lot of people there, it can't be helped if we don't bring a lot of guards for security purposes."

Because it's an inspection, we cannot take that many people. However, as a daughter of an aristocrat, Mimosa's House might not agree with her going out without a certain number of guards.

"How many people would it be okay to take along?"

"Up to two people... I will be taking Ryle and Dida along, as well as

Tanya.”

“If Ryle-san and Dida-san will be with us, I don’t think father will oppose to it.”

“Oh my, you seem to trust those two very much.”

“That is only natural. Their superiority has been known throughout the Kingdom... It is only natural to trust and rely on their strength.”

“I wonder if that’s the case. ...If you successfully receive permission, please send me a note.”

“Yes, of course. When should I send it by?”

“Sometime this week.”

“I understand.”

After that, until the sun went down, we continued talking about our days in the academy, and the current fashion in the Royal City. As the saying goes, time flies by really quickly when you’re having fun, and if Tanya didn’t tell me that should head home soon... I might have continued to immerse myself with talking to her.

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### Translator’s Message

I have a positive opinion of Mimosa and think that she’s quite intelligent. And based on her assessment of Yuri, even I would feel terrified.

# Chapter 39: Analysis

“...Young mistress. Are you thinking about what Mimosa Langley-sama said earlier?”

While we were riding the carriage to return home, Tanya brought up the topic. Although I was absentmindedly looking outside, I immediately focused my glance at Tanya.

“...When you said a while ago, when exactly do you mean?”

“It’s when she was talking about the daughter of the Baron, Yuri. Excuse me for being forward, but the young mistress’ expression looked like you were momentarily lost in thought.”

“...I am surprised. To think that Tanya was watching carefully.”

“It is the maid’s duty to understand what our master is thinking.”

Although Tanya clarified the reason why... I still think she’s amazing. Even though I intended not to show it on my face as much as possible.

“...Young mistress, with your appearance, it seems like you didn’t think that Mimosa-sama was overthinking things...”

“That’s right. However, it’s nothing really exorbitant?”

I have no grounds to suspect her. Or rather, because it was too extreme, I withdrew myself and tried not to think of those words.

...However, talking about it now might be a good idea. Since it’s Tanya, I am certain I can trust that she will not say anything to anyone. Above all, more than anything, she would probably feel really honored for me to talk to her about it.

“If you’d like, could you please let me know some of the things you were thinking of...?”

“Even though Mimosa has warned me about it... I really thought it was because I dug my own grave.”

“What do you mean to say?”

“First of all, about that soup kitchen. Although it was criticized by the aristocrats and other bureaucrats... But when one thinks about it from the perspective of the common people, wouldn't they welcome it? And they would think, 'They are actually thinking about us.'”

From what I heard from father, they cannot continue to distribute food for long. This country doesn't have the capabilities to do it. Because of the remaining debt from the previous war, I thought that the Finance should be tightening things up even more.

Thus, instead of using more and more money to distribute food to the people, I believe the money should be used for something else.

In addition, the people don't know the current financial situation of the country. They have no way of finding out. In other words, because they have no idea how much pressure the country's finances is under, when taxes are temporarily raised, their impression of the country will worsen. However, it doesn't mean that the impressions they have of the Second Prince will change.

“When thinking of it this way, they will be able to make allies with the common people. ...About Miss Yuri's behavior. She behaved that way even though she's an aristocrat.”

“About the distribution of food?”

“No. Her speech and behavior during that party.”

“I have heard about her behavior during the party, I believe it was something the Second Prince's faction would have pulled...?”

“Yeah, that's right. I think most aristocrats would think so. However, isn't it too convenient for it to be interpreted that way?”

“Convenient, you say...?”

“Right. For example, if I not only want to maintain the rights I have acquired but further gain more rights and power... Instead of the First Prince whose existence remains a mystery, the Second Prince is better.

After all, what kind of person is the First Prince, and what kind of

thoughts he has... because he has not come forward for over ten years, it is almost impossible to comprehend. As for Ed-sama, I think he is suitable and an easy target for Miss Yuri to elevate her own status, that's my impression."

"Is it because 'he is easy to manipulate?'"

"If one is to put it simply, yes. The arrogant behavior he displays when it comes to Miss Yuri, it might be what impresses Yuri even further."

"...I see..."

"That said, I have no grounds for suspicion... As I thought, I might be overthinking it."

Un, I feel like I have become a person who over thinks too much. If one obtained people one can use, then one should use them. If one wants to make sure Ed-sama rises to the throne, it would have been more than enough to make a frontal attack.

For starters, there was no need to drag Ed-sama's head and show him a flower garden... To show the royal family, to gather the hyena-like aristocrats, to drag other people in, and to choose situations where one would deepen the antagonism between the people of this country.

"However, young mistress. Just to be safe, it's better for you to take some precautions."

"That's right. ...For starters, I will be extra cautious in communicating with the royal family and other dealings in the Royal City. After all, the current King has fallen ill... With the current situation, I can't help but be anxious."

As for Azura Conglomerate, in order to not centralized its operation in the Royal City, it has directly opened a branch in each fief and has been recently increasing the number of exchanges made with foreign countries. When I consider the affected earnings, I found that this progress can't be helped, and it's better to withdraw from the Royal City before the confusion increases.

In addition, the conglomerates in the fief are sure to take similar actions.

To begin with, when I spoke to Moneda for the first time, the trade in the Royal City has already decreased.

Afterward, the peace and order of the fief should be maintain. Even if the confusion in the Royal City doesn't intensify, it doesn't mean that we won't receive sparks of it... Nevertheless, we have already established a security force beforehand. I guess I should have a discussion about this with Ryle and Dida.

"As for me, I will try to gather as much information as I can."

"I see... I'm counting on you."

When I returned home, I went to my room to relax. Since I am free the day after tomorrow, other than our conglomerate, I wonder if I should look around the Royal City.

Since it's been a long time, it might be good to look at the academy from the outside. For some reason, after meeting Mimosa again, I kind of missed it. While thinking about those things, I feel asleep just like that.

# Chapter 40: Tea Time with the Madams

Now then, today is the day to visit Earl Dranbalt. This time, it's different compared to when I went to visit Marquis Langley's house, and various other people have been invited. ...And because of that, I am really nervous.

"Iris-chan, you'll be fine so you don't have to worry so much~"

However, since I'm together with mother, I find it reassuring. I am really reassured. The next House I am to visit next is Baron Messi's House, so I want to take this opportunity to regain my senses.

When we arrived and Earl Dranbalt's House, a servant came to greet us at the door. And then, a man dressed in a tailcoat guided us. The place we arrive at was a beautiful courtyard filled with greeneries.

"Welcome, and thank you for coming. Lady Mellice, Iris-sama."

A woman who was sitting at the center table stood up and came to greet us with a smile. She has soft golden hair that seems to shine even more brightly under the sun. Although her figure was a little round, she seems gentle and cheerful... She was Earl Dranbalt's wife, Countess Dranbalt.

"Thank you for sending an invitation for today's event. Together with my daughter, we were looking forward to it."

Mother responded with a formal tone. No matter how close mother is with Countess Dranbalt, she wouldn't act out of order because there were others around.

"Oh, my, for Lady Mellice to say something like that, I'm very honored. Please, come in and have a seat."

When Countess Dranbalt said that, she pointed us to vacant place. A man wearing a tailcoat was immediately standing by near us.

"Then, I shall accept your offer."

And then, we respectively headed to our vacant seats.

The garden was well-kept and overflowing with greenery. And the tables were arranged opposite of it, giving it the best view of the surroundings.



What is stood out, even more, were the dresses people wore. Light pink, light yellow, light blue... Everyone was wearing pastel colors. Perhaps they each person was to represent a flower and were seated in that order as well. I see, the reason why the dress code – wear pastel colors – was specified on the invitation was to aim for this outcome.

“I shall make the introduction. This is Lady Remedy, Earl Caldina’s wife.”

“Please treat me well.”

When the lady standing on the left side of Countess Dranbalt saw me, she nodded at me lightly. When I saw her, I also slightly lowered my head.

“This here is Lady Dora Danas, Earl Danas’ wife.”

“I have been looking forward to meeting Lady Mellice and Iris-sama.”

The lady beside Lady Remedy said so and also bowed lightly. And I, too, like a bobblehead doll, bowed my head lightly again.

“And then, this lady over here is Salina Mines, Baron Mines’ wife.”

“I am honored to meet you.”

...With that, all the introductions were done. To be honest, it was getting hard for me to put faces to their names... so I was thankful that it ended.

And then, the tea party began. I ate some of the sweets placed on the table and drank the tea that was served. Unn, it’s delicious... Since it will be embarrassing if I cannot follow the conversation, I perked up my ears.

“The clothes Iris-sama wore the other day was very beautiful. From where did you purchase that dress from?”

Lady Dora suddenly asked that question.

“I used the cloth obtained from the East to make that dress. However, we have not gathered enough materials, but when we do, it will be sold in earnest.”

“Oh, so that’s how it is. Although the fabric was wonderful, the design of the dress was also unique and lovely. Where did the design of that dress

come from...?”

“I asked a tailor shop from the Duke of Amerlia’s fief to make it.”

“Then, that dress was designed by Iris-sama?”

“No, to say that I designed the dress is a little... I thought something like that would be nice, and roughly explained what I wanted.”

I can’t say that it was because I wanted something easy to move in... At any rate, because I’ve been wearing clothes and dresses that’s easy to wear and suitable for work, it would be difficult for me to suddenly start wearing tight corsets and extravagant and heavy fluttering skirts.

Thanks to my almost impossible request I made to the tailor shop’s designer-san, a non-heavy dress was completed to my satisfaction... That’s the only way to put it.

“So that’s how it was. However, I think that that dress will be popular in the future. Don’t you think so as well, Lady Remedy?”

“Yes. After all, it had garnered a lot of attention during the party. Even now, I believe many have gone to the tailor shop to order one.”

...I wonder if that’s really what’s happening? I mean, if it is like that, isn’t this the chance to advertise the clothes from the Duke of Armelia’s fief?

While I was thinking about it, before I knew it, the topic of the conversation changed. The current fashion, and the current state of each House.

The center of the conversation is the organizer, Countess Dranbalt, and mother. Countess Dranbalt indirectly brought the topic into the conversation and started to calm everyone down. Mother also didn’t try to obstruct the organizer in any way, and the place was brightening up visible to the eye.

“...Now that I think about it, about Earl Monroe’s House. A rumor came about that he has been using his influence a lot lately, has anyone else heard of it?”

Lady Remedy brought up that topic.

“No, but I do know that Earl Monroe has been holding a lot of extravagant entertainments lately. I once saw his wife wearing a brand new large diamond necklace, and two days after later at one of the events, I saw her wearing a brand new large emerald earring. When the jeweler came to our house, he implied that Earl Monroe has been ordering many pieces of jewelry and dress lately, you do know about it? Also, it seems like he has been going to Azura Conglomerate non-stop.”

“I am only in charged of the management of Azura Conglomerate, and for the management of our patrons, someone else is in charge of it... But after hearing your story, it sure is amazing.”

Because the glances were directed towards me, for the time being, I gave them an answer. Other than the basic overall management, I have not looked into other things.

As for the patron management and other things, I have left it all to Sei and other people. Thus, until now, I do not know how much each House has spent. However, even if I knew it, I wouldn't tell anyone else.

More precisely, if Lady Remedy's story is true, then I wonder why Earl Monroe is so prosperous? Was he like that from the very start? No, if I'm not mistaken, the granary is in his land. Although I haven't heard of him suddenly starting a business or anything...

“Isn't that right? I also received the news during the party.”

“What an enviable situation. Speaking of jewels, Lady Dora. Where did you purchase the jewels you wore during the party the other day? It was very beautiful and I was charmed just by looking at it.”

Right then, mother changed the topic of the conversation. Although I wanted to hear a little bit more about the previous topic, I guess I'll pull back here. Or rather, as expected of mother, she was able to observe everyone who attended the party.

“About that, it's a jewel called Topaz. Because I was enchanted by the beautiful red tinge of the jewel, I pleaded my husband for one.”

“When a woman pleads, it's a good way for the men to show their

resourcefulness. And so, was Earl Danas pleased with it?”

Hearing Lady Remedy’s words, I wondered if that was indeed the case, but for the time being, I shut my mouth and listened. I didn’t have a husband before I was reborn, and although I was engaged before... when I asked him to go shopping with me, Edward-sama found it really troublesome.

“Not at all, my husband is completely ignorant of jewels...”

“Even though he is ignorant of jewels, when he saw Lady Dora wearing it, I’m sure he would have surely fallen in love all over again. Don’t you think so as well, Lady Mellice?”

“Lady Dora is youthful and a lovely looking lady. Isn’t it because of that that Earl Danas was on tenterhooks during the party?”

When they heard mother’s words, everyone said ‘kyaa’ with a high-pitched voice. From that point on, the topics of the conversation kept switching in random order, such as who looked really cool.

As for those ladies with daughters, they started dreaming what kind of husband they would want for them. However, there was someone in the vicinity who couldn’t bring her heart to join in on the conversation.

...Mother as well, I wonder if she wanted to think about whom she would want me to marry? But because of what happened with Ed-sama, it is natural for families not to want me to marry into theirs.

I wonder if she was holding back because of me since she didn’t say anything about who she would want her daughter to have as a husband. ... Nevertheless, I am very thankful for it.

“...Iris-sama, what do you think about it?”

Hearing Lady Remedy’s question, I pulled myself together. It won’t do to think about too much during a tea party.

“I am very sorry, I was a little absent-minded just then... What were you referring to?”

“About your future husband. What kind of person would you think

would be best for you?”

“As everyone already knows, my engagement has been annulled. Thus, I want to live a quiet life in the fief for the rest of my days.”

As for my future dream, I want to be surrounded by children from the orphanage or something similar. ...I thought that it was a good plan for the future.

“Oh my... Iris-sama, surely you jest. You are not only the daughter of the Duke of Armelia, you have also done a brilliant job in managing the fief as the fief Lord’s proxy and is the President of a famous Conglomerate. In addition, didn’t the Queen Dowager also specially set her eyes on you?”

“...Is that so?”

“Yes. If our House was a Ducal House, by all means, it would be our privilege to have you.”

Looking regretful, Lady Remedy let out a sigh. As though agreeing to her statement, Lady Salina also nodded.

I didn’t think that they were assessing me in such manner, so I was little surprised. ...Nevertheless, even if they ask me for the kind of person I’d like to marry, I don’t really have anyone in mind.

...Even though there was a small feeling of depression, the conversation continued. Although I was feeling nervous, when it ended, I felt the event was quite pleasant. And for everyone to be able to enjoy themselves to this extent, this is attributed to Countess Dranbalt’s abilities.

I do not have the experience of being a host, and I don’t know if I’ll ever have a chance to be one in the future... However, if I get an opportunity to hold an event such as this one, I would want it to have the same friendly atmosphere as Countess Dranbalt’s... Or rather, as I thought, I would want to have the same sophisticated event that mother usually has, and because of that, I thought to do some training.

# Chapter 41: Strolling around the Royal City (1)

Now then, today is the day I take a stroll around the Royal City. I received a message from Mimosa saying she will be able to come, so I've been looking forward to it.

"...Young mistress, it's about time you make preparations."

While I was practicing yoga at my usual spot, I heard Tanya's voice coming from behind. Oh, my, it's already that time. And so, I hurriedly took a shower and started preparing. Because I will be going to town today, I changed to my usual "Alice" clothing.

"Mimosa-sama has already arrived."

"Then, please have her wait in the next room. I will be there soon."

When I finished preparing, I headed to the room next to mine. Although the next room is also part of my room, if the place I was dressing up in a little while ago is a private space, then the room next to that one has a drawing room kind of feeling.

"Good morning, Mimosa. I'm sorry to have asked you to come so early in the morning."

"Good morning, Iris. Oh my... what you're wearing suits you really well."

"Mimosa as well."

Because Mimosa will also be going to town incognito today, what she's wearing makes her more docile than usual. I guess one could describe her current appearance as a daughter of a merchant.

"And also, when I'm wearing this kind of outfit, I'm Alice."

"What is that?"

Mimosa looked like she was rather fascinated.

"An alias, it's an alias. It's not like I can announce my name to the public... So the first thing one would need to do is change one's

appearance, right? When you give yourself an alias, it gives an extremely different feeling.”

How should I say this, it’s gives a feeling of being an actress. When someone calls me with that name... I would make me get more into the role or something like that.

“I see... Since that’s the case, then my name will be Misha.”

“I understand. Well then, Misha. Shall we be off now... Or rather, I’ll make some introductions first. This is Tanya, I guess you already know her, and these two, Ryle and Dida, will serve as our guards today.”

The two people who were waiting behind, when I introduced them, they slightly bowed their heads. Although it was normal for Ryle to do so, but Dida is usually easy-going, so I felt quite uneasy.

“Nice to meet me... However, I’ve heard your names before, so it doesn’t feel like this is my first time meeting you. Please take care of me today. On the other hand, these two are my guards, Harry, and Dan.”

Harry and Dan who were standing beside Mimosa bowed respectively.

“Harry, Dan. Please treat me well.”

I also greeted the two. Harry and Dan has an “I am a guard!” atmosphere around them and felt somewhat stern. For now, since they are wearing plain clothes, I guess it isn’t so bad.

“Well then, since we don’t have much time, let us be off.”

First things first, we headed to the cafe in the Royal City. In here, one can eat chocolate cakes and various other desserts. I wonder how the sales of herbal tea are doing.

When I took a peep, it looks like it’s flourishing. The people who were queuing up for it formed a long time. Because we kept the price as low as possible, not only do the aristocrats buy them but also regular people in town.

“Now then, let’s go line up.”

“...Excuse me for being rude, Alice-sama. Wouldn’t be acceptable for you

to use your name here?”

Tanya quietly made a proposal. Everyone is probably thinking the same thing, and question marks lit up above their heads.

“About that, don’t you think there will be no point if they knew I was here? What kind of service they provide, the quality of the products they bring out, and how they treat the people who visit the store; one will not experience these things if one doesn’t come as a guest. I’ve also included how long we need to line up in today’s schedule.”

“I was being too forward, please excuse me.”

“Misha. Because it’ll be like that, are you fine with walking and waiting a lot today?”

“Yes. When one walks a lot, it’s just nice that your stomach will feel more empty.”

“If that’s the case, then I’m glad.”

After that, we waited for a long time before we were able to enter the store. ...I wonder if I should expand this shop. Let’s think about that after looking at the appearance of the shop.

The shop is divided into two section, one of the space is for take-out. And the other space has been converted to a coffee shop.

Hmmm... I wonder if it’s about time to construct an individual shop for take-outs. Because it takes up a lot of space, and their sales are about the same as the confectionery shop.

That said, ‘let’s buy some to take home after we finish eating’ ...there are also people who have those ideas. Should we keep the store divided but move them to a bigger shop? Or should we establish a branch shop? Hmmm, I’m uncertain.

“Hello, welcome to our shop. For how many people?”

“Seven people.”

“I’m really sorry. If it is acceptable for your group to be divided into two, I will be able to guide you to your seats at once...”



“It’s fine with us.”

And because of that, we were seated separately. Because the other seat is relatively near, we decided to split it this way: Mimosa, Ryle, Tanya, and I in one table, and Harry, Dida, and Dan in another table.

In the beginning, I wanted Tanya to sit in the other table to keep the balance, but she expressed her disapproval. She said, to actually sit in a different table from mine...

And so, I asked if it would be fine for Mimosa and Harry to switch places. So what if they were her guards? Mimosa said that as long as either Ryle or Dida was here, she would be reassured. ...For some reason, it seems she really trusted our two guards.

I ordered a cake set while Mimosa ordered the assorted fruits set with chocolate sauce. After we finished ordering, while waiting for our order to arrive, Mimosa and I started a light chatter.

The system of this cafe: the waiter will come to take the order and write it on a piece of paper, and then pass the order to the kitchen. The table number will be written on that piece of paper and is then passed to the counter that does the accounting.

The number on that paper is the same as the number of the wooden tally on the table. And as for the wooden tally on the table, its back is painted white.

When all the orders have been delivered, they will use the white part, but if another order is made, they will turn it again. Of course, when one makes another order, it will be added to the paper that has been passed onto the accounting counter before the order is delivered. ...That’s the kind of system the cafe uses.

Because it might get difficult to calculate the amount when the time comes, an abacus was introduced. When I was still living in Japan... I’m really glad I learned how to use an abacus when I was in primary school.

The employees were puzzled by it at first, but they have gotten used to it by now. It was well received and their mental calculation has quickened.

Not just in the coffee shop, but I wonder if it should be introduced in the primary school division of the fief... I shall put this under consideration.

While I was thinking those kinds of things and chatting, before I knew it, our order had arrived.

“Waa... it looks delicious...!”

Mimosa looked delighted just by looking at it and immediately started eating. As for me, because Merida will always let me try her prototype or when she comes up with new products without fail, it doesn't feel new to me. That said, eating it here in the shop and eating it in the house gives a whole different feeling.



“...Hmm~!! It tastes good!”

Mimosa said so while looking very satisfied. Somehow, I feel happy as though I was the one eating it.

“I'm happy if that's the case.”

Although they were busy and there were many customers waiting, their service wasn't sloppy. I am genuinely happy that all the employees are working hard.

“By the way, why did you decide to start with the coffee shop?”

Mimosa suddenly asked. Before I knew it, the plate in front of her had been wiped clean.

“I didn't have any particular reason why I chose to come here first. It's just that they have really good raw ingredients here... that's all.”

“Nevertheless, it has become this popular, I'm surprised.”

“As for me, I feel blessed just by being here.”

It might be natural for Tanya and the others to feel that way after growing up in that kind of environment. ...It really does feel like a blessing.

“...Now then, it's about time we get going.”

After we finished eating and talking, we settled our accounts and left the

store.

“Next, we’ll be heading to look at the beauty products. Let’s head there slowly while exploring the Royal City.”

Because there’s quite a distance between the coffee shop and the shop that sells the beauty products, we have to walk for a while. On the way, I didn’t forget to roughly look at the shops at the Royal City and prices of their items.

“...Oh?”

Suddenly, my feet stopped walking.

“What’s wrong, Alice?”

“Just now, I thought I saw Miss Yuri or something...”

Because the person disappeared into the crowd, I didn’t get a good look. In addition, because she always stood out well with her entourage, it wasn’t that hard to recognize... but earlier, it looked like she didn’t have two or even one of her followers were with her.

“Are you sure you’re not mistaken? There’s no way she would come here alone.”

“...You might be right.”

I wonder if it’s because of what Mimosa said about her the other day, as well as my conversation with Tanya. It seems like I cannot get her existence out of my head.

I pulled myself together and headed to the next shop.

\*

Translator’s Message

Iris thought she saw Yuri. Is she the real one? And what was she doing? Hohoho...

PS: I had to run out and buy myself a strawberry cheesecake after I finished translating this chapter...

# Chapter 42: Strolling around the Royal City (2)

Similar to the coffee shop, we also lined up at the beauty shop, and I started to survey the place. Mimosa kept saying she wanted this and that, but because we will be going to the building reserved for members... I got her to act more prudent.

The members-only building is mostly visited by aristocrats, so Mimosa and I have no choice but to reveal our identities. Although the session will be held in a private area, the possibility of running into aristocrats there are still high.

To enter the place, one person must be a member and the person can bring in two attendants. Thus, Tanya, Ryle, and I are one group, while Mimosa, Harry, and Dan are in one group.

...If a limit was not set, everyone would be bringing many of their maids and escorts, and the shop will be in chaos. Thus, we had to take such measures.

Because of that, the store established a waiting area in the corner of the building for guards to wait in. ...Dida was waiting there, and while he's there, he will be watching the entrance of the building and observe the security.

And so, we entered the store. This shop looks like an aristocrat's villa here in the Royal City. Because we bought a large vacant mansion with a large garden, the walkway to the entrance of the building is quite long.

First things first, we present our membership card at the gate. After admiring the garden and the lush landscape while walking towards the mansion, we went inside the store.

After entering we will be greeted by a butler and presented our membership card. And then, we will be guided to a private room... that's how it works.

“...Iris-sama. Welcome, and please enjoy your visit.”

When the butler saw me, he wasn't confused at all. By the way, his name is Barrett. He used to work as a butler at a certain merchant's house.

"Oh, my, you're not surprised at all."

"I knew that you have arrived here in the Royal City. And I was wondering... when you will take the time to come visit."

"Since that's the case, it seems like I cannot inspect this place in secret."

When I said that in a form of a joke, Barrett smiled from ear to ear. Although he is already an old man, his smile has strange powers.

"With all due respect, Iris-sama. Many aristocrats come to visit this place every single day. Because even the most trifling thing might end up as a big problem... we cannot relax at all."

"Is that so. If so, I'm looking forward to seeing what's inside. But before that, I would like to talk to you, so please go ahead and guide Mimosa first."

"I understand. Then, Mimosa-sama please come with me."

"Please take care of me."

"Barrett. I will be waiting over there, when you're done guiding her, please come pick me up."

"I understand."

After I sent Barrett and Mimosa off, I left the entrance and entered a certain room. This room is near the vicinity of the entrance and has no particular use. Because the mansion is quite large, there are a number of unused rooms.

The second floor is basically where all the private rooms to receive guests are. One person per room, servants will guide the people there while the employees will describe the products or provide a demonstration for new products.

On the first floor lies the storage area for the products and a place for the employees to take a break. Although the room I am currently in is vacant, it is because it has not been decided what the rooms on the first

floor will be used for. I believe that in the near future, it will also be put into practical use.

“Welcome, how may I help you.”

Oh, my, it looks like someone has arrived. From the room, I heard a voice coming from the entrance.

“I came here today with a companion. Please take care of us.”

When I quietly opened the door to take a peak, Barrett had already returned to greet them. While I was gazing at the other party wondering who had arrived...

Oh, if isn't Earl Monroe. Although he is a little far away, that guy with a stout physical build, a head full of blonde hair and curly forelock bangs covering his forehead... there's probably no doubt about it? I wonder... if he is the guy from the rumors.

Then, I shifted my attention to his companion. I thought that it was either his wife or his son... but it was someone I was completely unfamiliar with. If it was a woman, I thought it might be a mistress of his, but I can't tell from the person's features at all.

However, because the servant or escort following them was completely different... Who is it? While I was thinking about those things, the two already went up.

“I'm sorry to keep you waiting, Iris-sama.”

While I was being absentminded, Barrett knocked on the door and entered the room.

“It's quite alright. That aside, Barrett. Does Earl Monroe often come here?”

“Yes, it is as you say. In one week, he will come once or twice without fail.”

“Is that so.”

That's relatively often. ...However, I'm happy for the shop.

“What kind of products does he usually buy?”

“As for the Earl, he buys a lot of confectioneries. Also, just recently, he purchased an Eau de Cologne. In addition, when he was accompanied by his wife or son, they also made many purchases.”

If one is to consider what's normal... is this normal? That said, although the prices are set quite high, it still depends on how much one buys.

“Heehhh... What kind of products do his wife and son purchase?”

“As for the Madam, as expected, it beauty products. She also asked to receive consultations often. As for the son, as one would expect, he's similar to the Earl who likes chocolate. Every time they come, they will purchase a splendid amount of things. We would often need to help load them into their carriages, and it would take a while before we finish.”

A splendid amount... he said. While I was wondering how they were able to consume them all... I remembered that Earl Monroe often holds entertainments, so they probably use them then.

“Iris-sama...?”

Barrett called out to me who fell silent while lost in thought.

“Oh, my, I'm sorry. What I would like to talk to you about is nothing extreme. I was just wondering if there's something bothering you or if there's something you would like to improve... If there's anything at all, I want you to let me know directly. Of course, I will have to confirm everything you report to me.”

Because he has already found me out, I wanted to listen to the opinion of someone who is working on-site. In addition, this is a place where aristocrats visit in a regularly, I was more or less wondering if there was anything bothering them.

“I see, so that's what you'd like to know. Presently, there's no particular problem. If I am forced to say something, I would like it very much if you could increase the number of employees a little more...”

“Employees, huh. In which area exactly?”

“For the time being, the cooks. There have been many requests to be able to order and eat here.”

“Is that so... However, about cooks, they are compelled to undertake a period of training, so even if we are to hire new ones immediately, you will still have to wait a while... I will look into it right away.”

When I get home, I will make sure to look at the recent sales of this place.

“Thank you. Well then, please guide me to the room as well. From here onwards, please let me see this place as a guest.”

“I understand. Now then, please let me guide you.”

After that, I completed my inspection as a guest. There wasn't any particular problem, so I ended it after suggesting this and that.

...Mimosa hasn't come out even after a while... that's what I was thinking while waiting for her. When she finally came out, she had a contented expression on her face, so she might have done quite a bit of shopping. ...Although I didn't hear the details from her.

With that kind of feeling, today's inspection ended. I feel a little forlorn thinking that my short visit to the Royal City is coming to an end, but I also wanted to hurry up and return to the fief...

“Thank you very much for today, Alice.”

“I would also like to thank you for today, Misha.”

...While feeling somewhat complicated, I returned to the house.

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### Translator's Message

I had such a hard time finding the right words to describe Earl Monroe's hairstyle... I should have just left it as “weed-looking funny hairstyle that covers his ugly wrinkles.”



# Chapter 43: Evening Party (1)

In just a couple more days, my stay in the Royal City will end. Today is the day I am scheduled to visit Baron Messi's house. According to the information provided by mother, Baron Messi typically returns to his fief early when it's about to be off-seasons. Hence, the party. In other words, it is to say farewell to his associates.

The members of the First Prince's faction, who have their own fief, are devoted to land management and often stay in their fief. In other words, they don't have many opportunities to gather. On the contrary, during a season, their attendance rate is quite high.

Because it's that kind of party, is it really acceptable for me to attend...? I started having those kinds of thoughts.

In the morning, I started doing yoga for mental concentration. Beside me was mother who has completely gotten into practicing yoga and was wearing an outfit similar to mine.

"Well, Iris-chan. Your expression is looking stiff. If you keep that up, you'll get tired."

"Is that so...?"

"Yes. Since you're going through all the trouble to loosen your body, you should work on your expression as well... That's right, that's how it should be."

After I finished practicing yoga, I took a shower and changed my clothes. Since today's party will take place at night, I'm still wearing my everyday clothing.

Because there's still some time, I decided to take a look at the reports sent by Sei and Sebastian so that I can immediately send necessary instructions as a reply if needed be.

Hmmm... As I thought, location is important. Since it takes time for the letter to arrive, when I have completely grasped the situation, it might have already changed. When I consider these things, I shouldn't continue

to involve myself in any unnecessary things and quickly return to the fief.

While I was scuffling with the documents, I heard a knock coming from the door and Tanya entered the room.

“Young mistress. It is about time for you to make your preparations.”

Oh, it's that time already? As I thought, when one is concentrated on doing something, time flies by quickly.

Because I cannot be late, I began my preparations at once. Because the party is being held at night, unlike the dresses I wore to Dranbalt and the Marquis' mansion, I wore a dress similar to what one would wear at an official function. However, as I expected, I am not used to wearing heavy dresses, and I wore something that feels refreshing.

After Tanya finished arranging my hair, I put on some accessories. Today's dress is dark blue in color that matches the color of my eyes. As for accessories, because my hair is silver, white will not compliment it, so blue sapphire was used instead. Hence, my dress is considerably embroidered with silver thread, making it stand out splendidly.

I finished my preparation in good time. Although the people in the world say that women take too long to prepare, but it takes even more time to put on a dress. In the first place, if someone doesn't help, one won't be able to put it on by themselves.

In the present condition, I rode the carriage and headed to the Baron's residence. Fuuu, I'm feeling really nervous... In the Royal City... since the mansions of aristocrats are all in one sector, there is not much distance between our mansion and Baron Messi's. However, because I'm feeling nervous, I feel like the distance was even shorter.

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While I was frozen stiff with tension, we arrived at Baron Messi's mansion and greet our host, Baron Messi.

“Thank you very much for your invitation to today's event.”

“I, as well, would like to thank you for your attendance.”

Baron Messi, as expected of someone who was once part of the military, his physical build is proportional. ...In addition, every single one of his body movements isn't coarse, but quite beautiful. He gives an impression of an attractive older man with silver-gray hair.

"Grandfather also felt regretful. To not be able to attend this gathering."

Even though grandfather wanted to attend, he couldn't make it. He said something about having official business elsewhere. Although he didn't talk about his business in full detail, he felt that it was quite regrettable. ... Well, compared to myself, grandfather has closer relations with Baron Messi.

"Please let me humbly say that I also felt extremely disappointed when I heard it. Please tell him that if another chance arises, please come by all means."

"Yes. Without fail."

After I finished greeting the host, I entered the hall and looked around. Wow, this is amazing. ...That was the first impression I had. There were many well-known figures here and there.

When it comes to aristocrats, there were many who received their title after some distinguished service. They started out as commoners, but after a meritable service, they were bestowed a title and became an aristocrat.

I have heard various names of the people who works as a bureaucrat from father. To actually see many of those famous people gathered in this place, it can't be helped if I'm astonished.

"...Lady Iris, it has been a long time since we last met."

"Oh... Earl Sagittaria, it has been a long time."

Earl Sagittaria serves this Kingdom as its Finance Minister. In plain words, he is one of father's subordinates, and I've met his acquaintance before.

If I'm not mistaken, when the Queen Dowager was still the Queen, thanks to his abilities, the Earl received a recommendation and was

appointed to his position.

Although he has the appearance of a good-natured old man right now, but to be able to handle the hard to deal with people in the Royal Castle... I don't believe he is what he appears to be.

"I did not at all expect Earl Sagittaria to make an appearance."

As someone who has an important position in the administration of the Kingdom, I didn't think that he would choose one of the Prince's side... This is my real feelings.

"Having a mere official such as myself will not make a difference in the fight for the throne."

Well, not directly, but it's not like he can say that. I'm sure that he has considerable influence... since he holds the purse strings of the Kingdom. And that is influence itself in its own way.

"However, whatever the Kingdom decides what's best for the Kingdom... it should also benefit the people. And I believe that it is the duty of the people part of the government to think about those things."

"Indeed. For you to think that way, it will definitely benefit the country."

When Earl Sagittaria heard my words, he said nothing and deepened his smile.

"Come to think of it, Lady Iris. The clothes you are wearing tonight looks quite splendid."

"Thank you very much."

"Are they also obtain from the trade with the East...?"

"Not at all. I ordered these clothes at a clothing shop in our fief."

"Is that so. The fief of Armelia is filled with many people of exceptional talents. It is also facing the sea, I'm quite envious. Refinement of salt, obtaining foreign currency from trade with other countries... because it's facing the sea, there are plenty of ways to enrich the fief. It also seems like the trade is doing favorably well considering the quantity."

“Y-yes... Well. It’s all thanks to the people.”

As expected of Sagittaria-sama. He has completely grasped the movement of each and every individual fief.

“How humble. I heard that it’s no small thanks to the instructions you’ve made, isn’t that right?”

For the time being, I responded to that question with just a smile. How should I put this, I found myself lost for words. Although my mind doesn’t feel painful, but it’s quite troublesome to be probed.

“Also, I heard that you are considerably involved in the fief’s politics. Reforming the taxation system, protecting orphans, as well as establishing a powerful security force. ...Exactly what in the world are you aiming for.”

To sum up his statement, earning foreign currency through trade, doing business in other fiefs to earn money, establishing a strong army, exactly what are you plotting? I guess that’s what he meant to ask. When I think about it now, I’m quite surprised. Be it Earl Sagittaria or someone else, they would want to take precautions.

“My only aim is to give the local people a peace of mind and a better life. To put it more finely, I want to provide a stable livelihood for them in the fief and give them a secure place to live in. That kind of target... No, it is more proper to call it an ideal. And how close I can get to achieve that ideal. However, this is something one must pursue for eternity... Thus, a ‘goal’ does not exist.”

“I see... I am exceedingly impressed. A government for the people... Even though you are still young, it seems you are already a public servant. However, please be careful. Because the remarks my lady made today, ‘a country for the people,’ might be perceived ‘baring your fangs.’”

“I am thankful for your advice.”

I have no intention of raising a revolt against the country. As a person of the Duke of Armelia’s House, I have more or less swore my allegiance to royal family.

However, I still believe that I should defend the people. Therefore,

depending on the situation, the possibility of confronting the country still exist. On a final note, that last thing I said is a card I definitely do not want to play if given a choice. ...Nevertheless, I cannot say it out loud.

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### Translator's Message

Formally addressing a noble's daughter:

Duke's daughter: Lady

Marquis' daughter: Lady

Earl's daughter: Lady

Viscount's daughter: Miss

Baron's daughter: Miss

Baronet's daughter: Miss

I want to move to Iris' fief... can someone show me the way?

## Chapter 44: Evening Party (2)

“Prince Alfred was trying to assess your ability as well. I have to admit, some of the Armelia House’s policies seem useful for the country.”

“Oh... Prince Alfred was?”

“...You don’t seem too surprised.”

“I was told prior that he was working in this country. Furthermore, since factions are beginning to form here and there, wouldn’t it be natural for them to be in contact with the head?”

In reality it seems like the people who have assembled here are quite independent on their own, but there are some interesting characters here and there. By collecting everyone here, the real mastermind probably planned on banding everyone together. Of course by gathering everyone here, it’d be especially difficult to summon a representative over the real.

“In addition, if that person has a large amount of supporters among the participants, there’s no doubt that the story of my fief has been told as well.”

After all, the Minister of Finance, Earl Sagittaria, and a large number of other rather important bureaucrats are assembled here. If he was able to make them accompany him, it’s not hard to deduce that they’re here for political reasons.

“If he is truly observing my house’s fief, then I am honored. However, I cannot say for sure that my territory is up to his standards.”

The reason why I was able to push my reforms to that extent was because of my position as the lord. Had I not been the lord of my territory, there would’ve been doubt that I’d been able to succeed so much. Because feudal lords hold so much power, if the country decides to move without permission of the lord it’ll take time between negotiations and work.

“I’m confident that he would be able to change the existing order to reunify this country.”

As if understanding my true intentions, Earl Sagittaria laughed lightly.

But what he said stuck with me. To change existing order and reunify the people? I glanced at Earl Sagittaria who was grinning. It was as if he was trying to read into my true intentions.

Like I said earlier, the power of one lord is too great. Basically a single territory is more like a state, and the collection of said states is named a country. For that reason legislation and taxation is somewhat regulated by the country, but as long as the state doesn't violate preset laws they can do anything. I also attribute my success to these allowances. The one exception to these understandings is, of course the capital, which is under direct control of the king.

So then let's assume that someone were to change these understandings. Wouldn't that lead to the rise and strengthening of the royalty? By removing power from the noble houses and giving it back to the royal family, it seems more feasible and thus quite possible to unify the country. But there's also no doubt that there will be opposition to that idea. Is this truly possible?

Even so, it bewilders me that Earl Sagittaria would discuss such matters with me. Even if I had decided to attend this party, there's no guarantee that I would side with the first prince's faction.

With that in mind, I rethought the conversation I had moments ago.

"In the end, what are you aiming for?"

Could it be that the previous conversation was linked to this one? If it were possible to indeed unify the country through reorganization of power, was it to inquire what I would do? I wonder if that's what he wanted to know. Would I rebel and secede.. Or would I follow and obey? Instead of father, he wanted to know what I, the substitute feudal lord, thought.

"I have not been able to understand what kind of person he is, so, as of this moment, I cannot decide. Therefore I will try to observe. However, even if he is able to succeed... even if it is for the sake of people, I will have no reason to be overjoyed."

I cannot say anything as I have yet to meet Prince Alfred in person, so



this is my true opinion. I cannot say with certainty that I would be willing to follow.

“Of course. Very interesting. Anyways, I’ll look forward to the day where you stand by him.”

“Surely you jest. It is terrifying to imagine standing by him.”

“My apologies, I took a joke too far.”

With that, I parted with Earl Sagittaria. My eyes followed him as he went and gave his greetings to several people, and after that was done, he took a small break.

While watching the Earl, I was surprised. Even though I only had a conversation with the Earl, I was exhausted.

While I was wondering such things, the host of today’s party, Baron Messi, had appeared by my side.

“How do you find today’s event?”

“I’ve been finding it very enjoyable.”

I said with a smile. If I let my guard down, my exhaustion would appear on my face.

“Ah.. That reminds me, Baron Messi, may I ask you a question?”

“What is it?”

“Why is it that your family decided to return to their territory so early? Excluding the people who are here, and the bureaucrats working at the palace, I’ve been told that most live in the capital during the season. And here I was thinking that most had already returned...”

I thought I had inquired too far, but much to my surprise Baron Messi started talking.

“That is because it was a task entrusted to me”

“A task, is it?”

“Yes. Has Lady Iris been told by Gazelle-sama about the Towair military campaign?”

“I have of course heard of it. Though, I have to admit my knowledge is limited to what I’ve read.”

“That should suffice. As you have probably been told, I once fought under Gazelle-sama in the Towair campaign. And because of that campaign, my achievements were awarded with a peerage.”

Baron Messi looked as if he was remembering a far away place.

“However, I am nothing more than a soldier. Even with the change in my status, nothing about me changes. And since we have yet to reach an armistice or a conclusion with Towair, I cannot leave my territory open for too long.”

His reason is understandable; however, something about his explanation doesn’t satisfy me. Earl Monroe who governs over the same territory as Baron Messi once reasoned it was because he was a “military man”. It is no doubt that he would be more wise to such things. But I can’t help but to feel that it is too rushed. Coming to the capital barely before the start of the Foundation Day holidays, and leaving soon after, almost makes it seem as if there is still the threat of an outbreak of war.

“Even now I see us in the middle of a war, I cannot as a man tell you that we will be okay, I cannot tell you to not be worried. And so I hope you stay wary... That is all I can say. As I cannot predict when the opposing side would come attack us, all I can say is that they are for sure aiming for us.”

“For our abundant grain and resources, is it.”

“Yes, as well as the hatred left over from the war 30 years ago.”

War... I cannot consider the distance between Amelia and Towair to be the reason to let my guard down. And once the war does start, the burden placed on everyone will be hard.

“Thank you very much for the warning.”

“Not a problem. I apologize for bring up such a terrible topic while here. I shall excuse myself now.”

“Not at all. It was very informative.”

# Chapter 45: Report and Anxiety

After that my limits were exceeded, and I decided to return home. Considering I had conversations with many individuals whom I hadn't spoken with as of yet, I think the outcome was quite good. I slept quite well that day—And now all that was left for me was to give my greetings to Father.

“—...Iris-sama.”

Tanya called for me while I was working on some papers.

“What happened, Tanya?”

“I have two things to report.”

“What is it?”

“First about Miss Yuri.”

Hearing those words I stopped my hands, and looked straight at Tanya.

“I conducted an investigation on her. Although the investigation is still ongoing, I believe I have discovered information that requires urgent notice, and therefore felt I should tell you as soon as possible.”

“Alright. What have you discovered?”

“First, of her upbringing. We found that her birth mother did not serve solely under Baron Noir's House.”

“Oh really? I was convinced that she was simply having an affair with her master. If that wasn't it, did you figure out her actual origin?”

“The Royal Castle.”

“The Royal Castle... What did she do there?”

“She worked as a maid in the castle. We don't know when and where she became acquainted with Baron Noir, but the same time she resigned, she entered the Baron's household.”

“So they met at the castle... It's rather likely considering how often the Baron drops by.”

There's a possibility that they had met at the castle. But is there a possibility that that would bring them together? I can't say anything now considering they are presently together.

"After talking to her previous co-workers, it seems that them being seen together happened rather frequently and was well-known."

As expected of the heroine's mother. Though the Baron's daughter seems to just have the name of the heroine and have no other redeeming qualities besides being cute.

"Unfortunately, finding information after their separation is difficult. It is not hard to find stories when she was alive, but finding information from after they parted is giving me some trouble."

"A single woman... Furthermore it was difficult to find witnesses of a daughter who seems to stand out so easily...Okay... Anything else?"

"A person who lived in the area once remarked that it must have been difficult to raise a daughter alone. He even asked if there was anyone she could rely on, and she apparently replied with 'No there isn't'. Though oddly enough it seems that after she died, a person calling themselves a relative of her daughter's came forward". (Tanya

"Was that individual Baron Noir?"

"It isn't certain."

"Do we know of his appearance?"

"I asked of his features, but received the reply 'I do not recall'. However, he did seem to remember that it was a man."

"Hm..."

Even though she didn't have anyone to depend on, a relative came forward? Furthermore, right after her death? I can only think of two possibilities.

The first possibility would be that for some reason she had to cut ties. Because of that reason, she couldn't rely on the main house, and only after she died would Yuri be taken into custody by Baron Noir. If this theory is

true, I'd like to figure out where she lived during that time.

If its not that, the second theory would be that Baron Noir was traveling incognito or that he had sent someone out to retrieve her. This theory holds the highest probability, but if that were indeed true it'd raise some other questions. Like why did he hide Yuri's existence for so long?

Either or, both hold suspicion.

"Also, how did Baron Noir prove that Yuri was indeed his daughter? There shouldn't have been any proof right?"

"It seems that he was able to recognize her through the pendant she obtained from her mother. Not to mention, she seemed to have two things that largely related her to her mother?"

Unfortunately, DNA identification nor any other scientific methods exist in this era, so physical proof is unavoidable. It's not like you can mask your identity as someone else either, so just having them look identical would be another point.

"Even so to have searched for more than 10 years... She must have meant a lot to Baron Noir."

"The reason for that is uncertain as well. We plan on continuing the investigation to find out more. With that, the report on Baron Yuri's mistress has concluded."

"Is that so. I'll entrust any further operations to you. And the second report?"

"Yes. The second report is about Earl Monroe, who you requested we investigate beforehand."

"Oh... Right."

When I previously met Earl Monroe during the opening of a Azuta Conglomerate store, he piqued my interest. I requested that she look into the story he told me during our tea party and any information about the boy following him.

"The boy tailing Earl Monroe that day was Deuban, it seems that he's

been treated as a guest by Earl Monroe and is constantly traveling with him. He was even at the Azuta invitational.”

“A guest.. Do we know who or where he’s from?”

“He seems to be the president of the Aira conglomerate. The Aira conglomerate does indeed exist in the Merchant Guild’s logs, and it seems they mostly deal in food resources. What type of food resources was not included, however.”

“It can’t be helped that we could not find information about their patrons. But for the Earl to be so close to such an individual...Is the reason their influence is on the rise because of that conglomerate?”

“Quite possibly.”

I can’t think of any other possibility. Given that that region is a grain producing area, and the Aira Conglomerate deals in food resources, Earl Monroe is probably selling his land’s harvests. But if that were to be true who are they selling that grain to?

“Tanya, could you find out more about that boy Deuban? Also investigate the Aira Conglomerate, especially information as to where they’re selling it to and how much”. (Iris)

“Understood”. (Tanya)

I have a bad feeling about this. Given yesterday’s party, the state of things seems to be taking a turn for the worse. I didn’t worry about it too much when I was governing my fief, but after coming to the capital I finally realized that I’ve been roped in as well.

I want to go back to my territory, but I also feel that I shouldn’t leave this problem alone. I can’t help but feel that somewhere there’s something brewing without my knowledge of it.

# Chapter 46: Side Story - Shortly before the evening party

“Why do we have to attend too...”

While I muttered, Ryle creased his eyebrows.

“There’s nothing we can do about it Dida, Master even requested that we attend.”

“Even still, doesn’t our training today have nothing to do with us?”

Today’s training was a mock battle against the Military and the Chivalric Order. A representative from each side would be chosen and pitted against each other in a match. It was usually something that has no relation to us, but Master Gazelle requested that we participate. In reality, I wanted to tag along with our princess to the evening party. Especially since it’s Baron Messi’s party, there would’ve been no worry of having to use formal language, and no danger to the princess since we sent out our specially trained guards. In the worst case scenario, Tanya’s there as well. I’m sure that I’m not the only one as of recent who’s been wondering where Tanya’s been off to.

Anyways, if I were given the choice between staying here with a bunch of sweaty people or going to the party, I’d choose the latter.

“It’s irrelevant to the present, but this is a good time to gauge the difference in strength between the Chivalric Order and the army. Make sure you properly observe.”

“I’m okay with that... But was there really a need for us to be here? In a place that makes us feel so uncomfortable.\*\*”

Today’s exercise is used to relieve a bit of pressure between the Order and Army. The Army is adamant in thinking that the Order are a bunch of spoiled brats who have no real experience, while the Order is equally convinced that the Army is all brawn and no brains. In my opinion both sides are rather equal. But for that reason, we use a mock battle to exchange ideas.

Most of this mock battle is thanks to Master though. Speaking of Master, he probably wanted to go to Baron Messi's party considering that he was once one of his trusted men. But he probably understood that he must deal with the weird tension that rises between the Order and the Army. Unfortunately, since Baron Messi understands that he has a duty to fulfill and cannot stay much longer in the capital, today was the only day the party could be held. I understand the trouble it puts Master in, but I'd wish he didn't include us.

Furthermore, just observe the match? That's boring as all hell.

When I glanced over at the Princess' practice grounds, I saw that the Order and the Army were all ready to go. I scanned across the field and happened to glance Master.

"Yo, you guys came too huh."

Master walked up behind us. Upon hearing his voice, everyone turned towards him. As expected of Master.

"Ah.. General Gazelle, excuse my rudeness, these two are?"

"These two are my apprentices. They happened to be at the capital so I called them over."

"General Gazelle's apprentices..."

Hearing Master's words, the atmosphere around us changed. Seems like they're trying to challenge—no, ascertain our abilities. As expected of Master's popularity. Well... We're probably being stared at because there aren't too many who can withstand Gazelle's lessons, nor have any chance to anyways.

"Well shall we begin, Knight Captain?"

"We're ready whenever, General Gazelle."

The Knight Captain... If I remember correctly his name is Doreina Kataberia, his son should've been in the same class as the princess.

Anyways, after that the 1v1 matches began. One after another, nothing but elites were sent out making the matches really entertaining. Both



parties were also relatively evenly matched. However, a select few from the Order side were surprised by the ferocity of the Army.

After 4 matches, the finale was about to begin. From the Order's side came the Knight Captain's son, and from the Army's side a single person came out.

"Wait just a second!"

In the midst of all the cheering, Master shouted out.

"How about we try a 2v2 for this match?"

"A 2v2?"

Everyone was confused by Master's remark.

"That's right! We'll have you guys form a pair and fight against my apprentices!"

I was surprised by his sudden exclamation. I stood there gawking while Ryle, who was next to me, who had either expected it or just given up, stood there emotionless.

"General Gazelle's apprentices... That seems interesting."

Unexpectedly, the army's representative quickly accepted the challenge. Wait, wait, wasn't this mock battle supposed to be so that the Army and the Order could dispel their misunderstandings? Aren't both sides currently at 2 wins and 2 losses? The crowd too raised a roar signalling their agreement to the challenge.

As I glanced at the Knight Captain's son, he was also nodding in agreement. Ah... Well, there's nothing I can do about this situation anymore.

"We're going, Dida."

"Okay."

Ryle stood up quietly and slowly made his way to the stadium. Sighing, I followed.

# Chapter 47: Dorsen's Reflection

My name is Dorsen Katabelia. I am the son of Druna Katabelia, the current Knight Captain. Since I was young, my father gave me lessons on martial arts. He told me that since I'd be protecting the royal family some day I'd need it. I took pride in those words. Whenever we began lessons, I worked as hard as I could. I was so committed to my martial arts studies that when I had to join the academy, I saw it more as a bother than a beneficial experience. I'd have rather stayed home and studied under the active-duty knights than go to school and learn. But since I was to be the heir, I had no choice but to go.

Since I was rather quiet to begin with, I had a great deal of trouble blending in. I often thought that it was useless to go to the academy after all. Then one day, I met a rather peculiar girl. She introduced herself as Yuri Noir, the daughter of Baron Noir. I met her while I was practicing alone at the training grounds. Since not many people use the training grounds at the academy, I found myself coming here every day to raise my skills.

"Impressive-"

That was the first thing she said to me.

"...What is?"

"Ah, my apologies. I come here almost every day, and see you come here every day. I always wondered what you were doing."

"The back of the building?"

If I remember correctly, the back of the building has a flower field. But since no one ever goes there there should be a lot of weeds.

"Yes. The flower field. Since its no one uses it, I figured I'd grow some flowers. Of course, I've gotten permission from the academy, though."

"Don't look so surprised. I won't go reporting to the school anyways."

"Ah... I hadn't thought about that possibility. No, that's not what I intended. I meant that it's pretty weird for a lady to be messing around in

the dirt right? That's why I'd be happy if you didn't spread that around too much"

"It's not like you're being a nuisance to others right? I won't say anything about it."

"That's great. And so what are you doing everyday?"

"Can't you tell?"

"I can see that you're training...but I can't see for what reason. Considering that you're already taking a Military Martial Arts class, it's weird."

Military Martial Arts is considered an elective class, and a lot of people with an affiliation to the Order take it. If not, it could be people who want to learn self-defense, or sons who have no chance of inheritance and therefore need to join the Order.

"I'm not training to supplement my classes."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, I've been training so I can offer my services to the royalty."

The girl, who had been blank-faced before, giggled.

"That's a lovely ideal. If I was protected by someone with such strong ideals, I would have no worries."

I'd remember that smile and laugh for a while.. After that occurrence, she began to sometimes drop in and watch me practice. Since I'd be training, our conversations were rather frank. At first I ignored her presence, but after a while I began to look forward to the time she'd appear. She commonly praised what I thought was the norm, and said that it was amazing or impressive. Those very words became my motivation and my training eventually picked up pace. I also began to think that my sword was not only for the royal family's but that it would also be for her.

By the time I realized I fell for her, she had become engaged to the Edward, the second prince. I felt dejected at first, but I still felt that I

needed to protect her. I kept these feelings, and eventually contradictions between my belief and fate began to appear. When I noticed these changes, I calmed down a bit and pledged that I'd protect her to the best of my ability.

So when Prince Edward and Lady Yuri were pitted against Duke Armelia's daughter, I sided with Lady Yuri. After we successfully exiled Lady Iris, I felt as if I had successfully protected Lady Yuri.

"How could you have done such a thing!"

I had been called out by father. As I was wondering what he was talking about, Father sighed heavily.

"I'm talking about the case with Duke Armelia's daughter!"

"...I can't understand what I have done to deserve being yelled at so much."

"Is that your real response?"

"Yes."

"It is impossible for us to even raise our hands against dukes, but it should be more impossible to raise a hand against a woman. Are you no longer taking the Knight's Code to heart?"

"So? Duke Armelia's daughter was teasing Lady Yuri."

"Did you see her tease Yuri?"

"N-No I did not... But to call it a groundless rumour..."

"Did you witness that exact scene? Did you happen to hear it happening?"

"N-no..."

"You disgust me! You had no evidence whatsoever but you proceeded to raise your hand against a woman. Even more so since it was against the second prince's fiance. You're a disgrace to the knights. You have sullied our household, and furthermore you have sullied the honor of a knight."

"But I was..."

“I’m not listening to your excuses. Go cool your head off in penitence!”

I, who couldn’t say anything in response, was led by a butler to a locked room. After that I took some time off of school in repentance. I was forbidden from training, and I spent my days idling in my room.

I couldn’t understand why I was treated this way. I had just wanted to protect her. But my father’s “You have sullied the Knight’s Code” kept spinning through my thoughts.

While I was pondering, I was called out by my mother.

“It has been a long time, Dorsen.”

I recalled that it had been a long time since I last had a discussion with mother. As of late, I had spent even my weekends at the Academy, but since my house arrest I had stayed in my room.

“It has been a while.”

In front of me was a can of tea and a mountain of never before seen brown teacakes.

“That’s called chocolate. It has gotten rather popular in the capital as of late. Have a taste.”

On mother’s recommendation, I put one in my mouth. It was delicious. It was sweet and a bit bitter, a really sophisticated taste.

“A conglomerate run by the Armelia Household began selling it.”

“The Armelia Household...”

“Rumor has it Iris was the one who invented it.”

Mother frowned as she murmured Lady Iris’ name.

“Hey, Dorsen. Can you truly say you did the right thing?”

“The right thing?”

“Yes. To be honest, what you did was a really big problem given our house’s standing, but putting that aside, do you really think you did the right thing?”

I couldn't understand Mother's true motive. I thought I did the right thing. While I was under house arrest, I reconsidered Father's words. Father probably wanted me to realize that as a future representative of the Katabelia House, I had to consider my social standings first and foremost. If it's like that, I have no reason to be ashamed of my actions. If I was able to protect her, my family didn't matter.

"You know, Dorsen. This is a bit rude to say, but I'd have to side with Lady Iris. "

"For what reason, Mother?"

"Considering Lady Yuri courted a man with a fiancée, and that man ended up stolen away, I'd say Lady Iris' harassment was not uncalled for. A woman who loves her fiancé had her fiancé seduced by another woman. It wasn't unjustified for Lady Iris to channel all her jealousy and hate at Lady Yuri."

"That is.."

"The man she loved was stolen. She was even exiled from society because you guys confronted her in front of everyone."

I recalled her last words at the Academy. Tears streaming down her face, she said "What more do you guys plan on taking from me? First my fiancé and then my position..."

"I see these teacakes as her resolution. The resolution to live alone, to make it through society without having to rely on marriage. Considering she was banished from society and her engagement was annulled, finding another engagement would be nearly impossible. Dorsen, you.. You raised your hand against that girl, supported a conspiracy, and on top that looked down upon her... Do you think that's correct as a knight?"

"That is.."

I couldn't even object. I hadn't thought about it. I hadn't seen that she'd be in pain, that she'd be depressed... I hadn't considered those obvious things.

"I understand you wanted to protect the girl you liked. But did you really

hone your skills for that reason alone? Did you feel fulfillment when you raised your hand against such a girl?”

Mother’s words stabbed my heart even more. I began to think she was right, but there’s also no going back.

“I can’t say too much since I’m not a knight, but I can say for sure what you did to Lady Iris is the same exact thing as pure violence.”

When I was lectured by father, all I could feel was contempt. But now I felt pangs of confusion and regret.

“You should reflect on your actions more.”

After conversing with mother, she permitted my return to the Academy saying too many absences were bad. I attended my classes as usual, and I once again returned to the training grounds. I wanted to clear my mind after listening to mother. Maybe I wanted to run away from the truth mother had revealed to me, or Lady Iris’ words. I wasn’t sure which. I graduated from school while avoiding meeting Lady Yuri or Prince Edward.

After graduation, as planned, I joined the Order. I continued my life learning under my seniors.

Then one day, a mock battle with the Army was announced. I was confused as to why I was invited. I agreed to the invitation since it’d be a great opportunity anyways.

There, General Gazelle appeared. Although being affiliated with the Army, General Gazelle is well respected in the Order as well. Beside him were his apprentices. Upon hearing that those two were his apprentices, the Army and Order began to buzz. To be honest, even if one wanted to be taught directly by General Gazelle, it was impossible. His popularity made it impossible to find students.

After being introduced to the three, the matches began. The crowd seemed to get more excited with every match. Eventually we came down to 2 wins and 2 losses. Next would be my turn. Expecting it, I stood up. In front of me was one guy from the Army Corps. As the time ticked down to

the start of the match, General Gazelle declared that we should fight his two apprentices instead.

Interesting... I thought. To fight against my idol's apprentices... I was excited to see how skilled they are. I was excited to see how much I'd grown.



# Chapter 48: The Outcome

“...Round start!”

At the referee’s shout, I swung my sword at the man named Ryle with all my strength. I glanced over and saw my original opponent doing the same. It seems like we both came to the conclusion that we’d have no chance of winning if we fought them together.

Ryle deflected my attack with his sword. The clang of metal on metal reverberated across the arena. From then on, no matter how hard I tried to overpower him, he didn’t move an inch. Seeing him so unruffled, taking my swings as if they were nothing, ticked me off.

If this continues, I won’t be able to land a hit. Considering my options, I took a step back and tried to attack from a different angle. As I began to attack again, my sword was repelled, and this time I was pushed back by a torrent of blows. Each and every blow was heavy, and it was all I could do to protect myself.

“...kuh.”

I tried looking for a hole, a place to break through, but couldn’t find anything resembling an opening. Being one-sidedly attacked, I couldn’t even muster an attack. ...It’s been a long time since I’ve been forced into a corner. Given my upbringing, I’ve never lost to my colleagues. When I joined the Order, I worked hard and won. Even still... In this situation, I can only defend. My opponent is calm and composed. I can’t see the possibility of me winning this fight. To be honest, I’m astonished by the difference in skill between us.

Clang

In my periphery, a sword flew through the air. It seems like the match between the army guy and Dida has concluded. The winner is Dida. At the same time, Ryle’s swings became stronger and stronger. As I thought, he had been taking it easy on me. The blows continued until eventually, I too was disarmed.

I lost... I tried to surrender, but Ryle kept swinging his sword.

“Wha-..”

Normally, if your opponent loses your sword, you’d pull back. All I could do was dodge, I couldn’t even murmur what I thought. Given the strength of his blows, the speed at which he swung his sword was astonishing.

“Stop! The match is over!”

Ryle stopped his sword upon hearing the referee. His sword was inches away from my neck, I was barely saved by the ref.

“.....”

Ryle pulled his sword back with a look of disappointment. I let out a sigh of relief.

“...Why aren’t you two affiliated with either the Army or the Order?”

I relaxed, not having wanted to confront the last attack. Instead, I asked them something that has been on my mind. If it were them, I’m sure both organizations would welcome them, but I’ve never heard of nor seen them before.

“We have someone who we must serve.”

“But... With that level of strength...”

“So what? I never even once thought of serving the royal family. As long as I protect the princess, I’m fine.”

“...Dida, you... You don’t need to say such a thing here.”

Ryle sighed at Dida’s outburst.

“But Ryle, aren’t you the same? What has the country done for us? The one who saved us was the princess.”

“That is true.”

“That’s why. We have no intention of joining the Army nor the Order.”

After that remark, both Ryle and Dida left the arena. General Gazelle took their place in the arena and stood in front of the Army and the Order.

“You’ve done well, all of you. Let’s set the pleasantries aside for today and have a drink.”

With that final speech, the mock battles had ended.

While the arena was getting lively again, I figured I’d go wash off my sweat, so I headed to the nearby watering grounds.

“Nice work today.”

Having been tapped on the shoulder, I turned around to see my senior standing there. Since he was the closest to me in age, he frequently helped me out.

“That fight earlier was impressive.”

“Not even. I didn’t even come close to being on par with them.”

“Well that’s a given. If they were to fight someone on equal grounds with them there’d probably be only General Gazelle on the army’s side, while on the Order’s side there’d Captain Malcolm.”

Captain Malcolm was the Order’s ace. If General Gazelle’s apprentices could fight on par with him, it’d be an amazing feat.

“I truly wonder why those two won’t come to the capital. I’m sure that both the Order and the Army would welcome them with open arms”.

“They explained earlier.”

“Even still...”

“When you suddenly questioned them, I was terrified. If you had continued, there’s no doubt that they have drawn their swords on you.”

“You’re kidding, right...”

I glanced at my senior hoping he was joking, but I could only see him grimacing.

“Just like you, both the Army and the Order tried to scout them a while back, but we were firmly refused. We came on too hard, and there was duel. They said that their master had been insulted by the scout. They won.”

I was dumbfounded. True, if your master was insulted as a knight you had the right to challenge them to a duel, but I've never heard of it actually happening before. I could only imagine them as mad dogs, protecting their master at all costs and barring their fangs at anyone who crosses them. But to have someone that can control such a beast, just who could their master be?

"...That fight was worse. They weren't playing around like they were today, and had General Gazelle not stopped them, the scout would've lost his life."

"It was that bad, huh..."

"Yeah. They don't follow the Order's code, nor do they fit the Army's ferocity, seemingly adapting to the situation. Dida's movements were too fast to perceive, while Ryle's attacks were too strong to guard against. That fight was unforgettable. That reminds me, you were also saved from Ryle's blows towards the end as well."

"Why?"

"The master of those two is none other than Duke Armelia's daughter, Iris. I feel sympathy for your terrible luck. It's highly likely that General Gazelle knew beforehand that the results of the competition were likely to disturb the balance between the two organizations. That's why the two would step in to ensure that neither party would win. In the worst case scenario they probably decided to allow our two versus their two to defuse any bad situations. After the score ended up being 2 wins and 2 losses, they appeared. And when they did I figured since it was your turn next, they'd be taking revenge for what happened at the academy. I was seriously worried about you for a second."

"That is..".

Their master was Duke Armelia's daughter Iris... Hearing the identity of their master, I was assaulted with a wave of emotions. Surely it was a joke that she was leading them, that she was the one they were attached to...

"That's why I said you did great coming back alive."

I now feel that way too. It was good that today was only a mock battle. It was good that I fought Ryle over Dida, or else I might've not been standing here right now. I felt a chill creep down my back.

“...Senpai.”

“What is it?”

“What do you think of Duchess Iris?”

“Don't look for an answer from me. After all, I've yet to talk to or even meet her.”

I felt those words pierce my heart. Before that event even occurred, I recalled that I never spoke to her once.

“But you know... seeing how those two act, I can only say that it seems like she's a big-hearted person.”

“.....That is a good point...”

# Chapter 49: Complicated Feelings

“Sorry, I seem to have drunk too much.”

I thought Grandfather would be the only one in this morning, but Ryle and Dida were also in. Grandfather tends to be rather zealous sometimes, so the two being brought with him as escorts can't be helped.

“Tanya, can you make sure these two get plenty of water?”

“Certainly.”

Whilst directing a request to Tanya who had been standing at my side, I sit down in the seat opposite from Grandfather.

“Grandfather, even if it's you, drinking too much will be bad for your health. Shouldn't you lessen the amount of alcohol that you drink?”

“Kuh...”

Grandfather grimaced... He does love alcohol after all.

“And so, how much did you drink last night?”

“I was drinking with the guys from the Order and the Army. So.... I may have had too much fun and decided it wasn't enough, so I took these two and went out drinking.”

“Geez..”

The cause of this is that last decision. Since long ago, Grandfather would take the two out to drink, trying to teach them their limits, but the two would come back unconscious every time. Grandfather has taken a liking to the the two so he sometimes ends up forcing drink after drink on them.

“...Please excuse the interruption.”

“Oh. Tanya, what is it?”

“Rudeus-sama has come to pick up Sir Gazelle.”

“...What!”

Grandfather suddenly panicked. Since Grandfather rarely shows that side of him, I laughed.

“Tell him I’m not here.”

“...But...”

As Tanya was thinking about how to pass that information to Rudeus, he appeared from behind her.

“So Grandfather... I’ve heard that you drank a store dry again.”

“No, that’s...”

“How many times do I have to tell you to please restrain yourself? You’re a very influential person in this country. It may be peaceful now, but if you were suddenly attacked while you were unconscious, there will be nothing we can do. I beg for you to drink less outside!”

Hearing Rudeus’ argument, it seemed like Grandfather’s shoulders shrunk smaller and smaller. Rudeus is my mother’s brother’s son.. Basically he’s my cousin, the head of household and heir to be of the Anderson House. Incidentally, Marquess Anderson says frequently that since he’s weaker than Grandfather he doesn’t want to be affiliated with the Order or the Army. Similarly, Rudeus isn’t affiliated with either and is simply studying to be the successor. Though I don’t know what he’s studying in particular... As one would expect, he is Grandfather’s grandson. His athletic ability is similar to that of Ryle or Dida, and his physique is slender but well built.

“It’s been a long time, Rudi.”

“It has been a while, Iris. Ah, sorry. Although it’s a long-awaited reunion, we meet because of this kind of reason.”

I’m 2 years older than him, so we met during one year at the Academy. But since we were in different years, meeting him was difficult, and near the end I was also banished from the Academy.

“It’s fine. I was also telling Grandfather that he should drink less.”

“Is that so? I’m thankful that Iris is telling Grandfather the same thing. Grandfather won’t listen to what I say, but surely he’d listen to you.”

“Surely that’s not true. Oh, would you like to have some tea as well?”

“I’d love to accept such a rare opportunity, but I have something to do afterwards. Alright then Grandfather, time to go home.”

“Ugh..”

“Grandfather, thank you for bringing Ryle and Dida home. You should also go home and rest your body.”

“Can’t I stay here?”

While creasing his eyebrows, Grandfather pleaded.

“What’re you saying? We’re going home now.”

Rudeus shot down Grandfather’s plea. As I thought the conversation between them is amusing.

“Iris, let’s have a proper conversation next time.”

With that, Rudeus pulled Grandfather out of the room. I thought to myself, where does Rudeus hide that sort of strength.

Like a tornado that passed, the surrounding got extremely quiet.

“... Tanya, could I get one more cup?”

“Certainly.”

As I was planning to take a bit of a longer break, Berne walked into the room.

“Could I perhaps join in too?”

“Of course. Sit over there.”

Upon my words, my excellent maid, Tanya, places a cup of tea in front of Berne.

“It’s been a while since we’ve had a conversation like this.”

The last time we met was when the Foundation Day party was held, and even then I didn’t talk to him. I had my own duties to attend to while Berne was following father around doing work.

“Yes... that is right.”

Berne nodded in affirmation, and drank some tea. The tea fit his palate



and his expression relaxed.

“I thought that you’d be going back to your fief soon.”

“Yes. I’ve already been away from my fief for a long time, it’s probably about time I should head back. ...So, how have you been, Berne?”

“...I’ve learned a lot working under Father. I need to recover the time I’ve been wasting up until now.”

“It’s not like you’ve been playing around so I think it’s fine, isn’t it? And since it is something unique like academy life, I don’t think it’s too bad.”

I reminisced my previous life. If I remember correctly, school life is one of the vital moments. You don’t realize it until you enter the work force. You work with, study with, fight with people of the same age...You sometimes have bitter moments, but in the end it’s enjoyable. In my opinion, the time when you finally understand the joys of youth is a bit after you finish your school life.

“...But I’ve stolen that precious time from you.”

“...?”

I couldn’t hear Berne as his voice got quieter. His facial expression changed so I understood it was about something bad.

“... Nee-san. I have something I need to apologize for.”

“I was thinking about what you were going to say, but what exactly are you apologizing for?”

Even if I didn’t ask what the reason was, I could see that he was talking about my banishment from the academy.

“... The banishment from the academy.”

I asked the question anyways since I wanted to know his motive.

“You don’t need to apologize for that. It was my fault that I was stubborn. So it was my mistake, not yours.”

“You said that last time too. But I don’t think what you said is correct. At that time I was moving solely based on wanting to be loved by her.

Working off of just my emotions lead to where we are now.”

“So what you wanted to show me was that you’re aiming for the position of Prime Minister, and this apology was to show your resolution for it?”

I interpreted his apology as, “I won’t be swayed by my emotions anymore”. He came to that understanding while working under Father most likely.

“That is one reason, but it’s not only that.”

“...What else is there?”

“When I was attracted to her, I moved on nothing else but emotion, similarly, I acted condescendingly to you who acted on her own emotions. You also have a heart of your own, and I failed to understand that your heart must have also been scarred. Knowing that, I’d like to apologize as a family member.”

“....”

I had no words regarding Berne’s reason. I felt a bit cross that he noticed now, but I also felt a bit glad.

Ever since that ending, I couldn’t see Berne as a family member. During that time, during that moment, Berne had chosen Yuri over me.

In my previous life, I thought that siding with the girl you liked was obvious, but at the time my self as Iris was yelling, “Why... Why! Why do you not understand. I just loved him so much. Even you Berne, why would you throw me aside?”. I can understand my feelings more than I can understand myself. I sympathized with the yelling inside of me.

To be honest, I didn’t care so much about Dorsen or Van because they were less involved. But I felt different towards Prince Edward and Berne. Since I was engaged to Edward, I felt attached to him. As for Berne, he was my precious family member. And so when the two sided with her, I felt shocked that I had been tossed away so easily. Furthermore I was disgraced even further by the two.

I was denounced in front of a great number of people. It was good that

my memories of my previous life resurfaced then, but if that had not occurred I may have fallen into a state of panic. Then and there, I also swore that I would never fall in love again, and on top of that I would never fully trust people. I was even thrown away by someone I considered family. The event that turned me into who I am made it so that I couldn't simply forgive him.

The cold part of myself couldn't help but think "It's too late now", but the other side of me wanted to forgive him.

"...I accept your apology; however, I cannot forgive you just yet."

If it was her... If it was Yuri, would she have forgiven him right away? A useless thought surged through me.

"That is enough for me."

Berne accepted my response with a smile.

# Chapter 50: Father's Advice

...Well, I guess it's about time to leave.

Thinking that, I headed towards Father's room. I knocked on the door, and walked in.

"Excuse me, Father."

Father stared at me from beyond the wall of papers. Though I spoke to him once after I was banished from the Academy, that conversation feels like it was forever ago.

"You're heading home?"

"Yes. I plan on returning to the fief tomorrow."

"Is that so."

Father placed down his pen on the table. He then gestured towards the seat that was placed in front of the study room table.

"If you'll excuse me."

I obeyed and sat down.

"I have one thing that I want to warn you about."

Upon hearing Father's strict tone, my posture corrected itself. It feels as if this conversation is more strict than the last time we faced off.

"What is it?"

"Be careful of Queen Elria and her house... the Marquess Maeria's household."

"I understand they're the head of the 2nd prince's faction, so I'll be sure to take extra care."

"That's not what I meant. During the Foundation Day party, you proved you protected the crown prince's back in front of both domestic and foreign powers."

"So basically, I've become a nuisance to Queen Elia and the Maeria Household?"

My engagement to the 2nd prince had been annulled. Because of this, I figured it'd be next to impossible for me to be accepted by their faction. It's not a question of just my own feelings, but their image becoming worse. If that were the case, I'd be nothing besides a nuisance in the eyes of Queen Elia.

"No.. Not just you, the Armelia House too."

"Oh..."

"By nature, the Armelia household is seen as an annoyance to the Maeria house. Although I'm a comrade of the royalty I'm merely the prime minister, and because Melly is a favourite of the crown prince and has such an influential voice in high society, we've managed to stand at the top. Even so we've avoided being involved with political affairs for a long time. By doing so we avoided being attacked by the Maeria house again and again. But now..."

"By breaking my engagement with the second prince, I've applied pressure as a daughter of the Armelia house..."

"Precisely. You caused the fief to boom even faster than I could imagine, and even managed to found a conglomerate and turn a profit. You've accomplished too much too quickly. Because of that we've become an existence that cannot be ignored by the Maeria House."

"...My.. My apologies..."

How shameful... Everything going so swimmingly had me simply accepting my good luck and not considering its aftereffects. It was something that I could have seen had I given it even the smallest amount of thought – how annoying my existence was to the Armelia house. I was allowed that position out of the kindness of my father's heart. Yet, to think I simply caused my family more trouble...!

"...No. It's also my fault for not gauging your strengths properly. No need to apologize."

"But still.."

"Fortunately, nothing has happened yet. So, Iris... Take the utmost

precaution when moving forward from here on out.”

“Yes!”

Hearing my response, Father rang a bell. A maid promptly entered the room.

“Something to drink.”

“Absolutely.”

Without a moment’s delay, a teacup was placed in front of me. I decided to drink it to calm my racing heart.

“This may seem a bit redundant...”

Looking troubled, my father prepared to speak.

“... It’s obvious that you have to take precautions around the Maeria house, but you must also at all costs avoid Queen Elria.”

“Is that different from what you said earlier?”

“...It appears that Queen Elria betrayed the royal palace.”

Father spoke slowly, choosing his words with great thought. What is he saying with such delay..?

“... The disappearance of the real queen-to-be seems to also be related to Queen Elria.”

“Father, have you such proof for a theory like that?”

“There was no evidence left. Are you saying that we should try investigating the queen?”

“...It was a slip of tongue.”

If I think about it, in this world where forensic investigation doesn’t exist, finding the answer would be difficult. It’d also be difficult to use physical force on someone with such high influence.

It could be a ploy by the 1st prince, or it could be true. I don’t know who it might be, but the reason for spreading this rumor might be so that people won’t investigate it further.

“Anyway, there’s a rumour like that floating about. Make sure you take heed of what’s happening around you.”

“Yes.”

I felt my heart shiver. I don’t want to acknowledge it, but it seems like the opposing side is trying to single out opponents.

“I’ve told Tanya, Ryle, and Dida ahead of time, so you be careful of yourself too.”

“I’ll take Father’s advice to heart.”

I’ve come a long way since my confinement. I know for sure that I don’t want to die yet. Furthermore, if I were to die at this point in time, there’s no doubt I’d cause trouble for my territory’s people. The reform I’m leading right now and the politics surrounding my territory cannot be left aside.

“... In addition, you’ve been looking into Baron Noir’s daughter, Yuri, correct?”

“Ah... Father seems to know everything.”

“Well... So how much do you know?”

“Yuri’s mother was a maid that worked in the royal castle.”

“Alright. ...By the way the family that was protecting her was the Reuben house.”

“...The Reuben house?”

I tilted my head in confusion at the name of a house I never heard of before.

“This is the limit of the information I can divulge at this moment.”

Hearing his statement, I gave up on prying more information from him.

“If you look into this, you should be able to discover what’s been going on at the capital. But don’t look too far into it. You’d only be adding more stress to your already severe situation.”

“...Then why has Father...”

“If your protégé was sniffing around the capital, you’d want to stop it before something happens right? If it’s just a family name you should be able to discover information about it from a book.”

“...Thank you for the information.”

‘Don’t look into it any further’... huh. Considering our previous conversation, I can’t simply do what I please anymore. As expected of Father. I have no reason to object.

“Thank you for the time. With this I’ll excuse myself.”

“Ah. Be careful on your way home.”

I almost thought I heard him add “too” to the end of his sentence. True, it’s practically a given that attacking travelers is easier. I should listen well to what Tanya, Ryle, and Dida say on the way home.



# Chapter 51: Milady, We're Under Attack

And so, it came to pass. Rather than carrying out an extravagant farewell party, I opted to bid adieu to the people I'm close to before setting off for the fief.

All my family members, together with all the servants, sent me off. Even though I would only be "returning" to the fief, for some reason, I felt slightly lonely.

"...Milady. We will be journeying back in the fastest pace possible. Although it might be uncomfortable, please forgive me and put up with it somehow."

"It's all right, Tanya. Besides, everyone is doing this for my own safety, and since that's the case, I have no reason to complain."

Just as Tanya described, the journey back was anything but pleasant. I spent the entire day being jolted about inside the carriage and spent the night in local inns while incognito. When night turns to day again, I boarded the carriage once more. Rinse and repeat. Although it was tiring, but because I was the cause of it all, I can't complain.

...Rather than that...

"Everyone, I really sorry about this. To have everyone accompany me in such a serious predicament."

Although I am able to maintain a satisfactory state since I am riding the carriage, however, my escorts all have to ride horses almost without any breaks. Compared to my state, they must be feeling a lot more fatigue. Because I felt remorseful, I apologized to them a couple of times in between breaks.

"Milady, there is no need for you to apologize. We are, after all, milady's escorts."

"There are, perchance, adversaries who have personally set their sights on me... Ryle, as well as Dida, aren't you two also being more attentive than usual?"

On the account of us spending time together ever since we were young, just like how I can tell what Tanya is thinking despite her natural deadpan expression, I can also read their atmosphere in spite of their aloofness.

Even though these two have always been levelheaded, they have been jittery this entire journey. Apprehensive, they are giving out this kind of feeling.

We might get attacked, but there's also a chance we might not be. If we do experience an attack, how would it take form? It might perhaps come as a frontal attack, or they might come without a sound at night. They might also resort to pure violence, or they might use poison as their tool to take my life. If they use that tool, how much would they have at their disposal? Because they are that kind of opponents.

From the start, a person from the royal family has set their sight on my person... Many would have already abandoned such a troublesome master, and quickly go someplace else. Especially if it was Ryle or Dida. Even so, they expressed that they wish to follow me. Because of that, although I'm happy, I also feel guilt-ridden.

While having those thoughts inside my head, perhaps Ryle knew what I was thinking, he knelt down in front of me.

"...Whether it's becoming milady's sword or shield, I take pride in it. This time, and even in the future... I will continue to ensure milady's safety."

And then, Dida also knelt down next to Ryle.

"...I also take complete pride in being milady's sword and shield. Today, and even in the future... I will use my sword for milady and master."

As soon as Dida finished his vow, the other surrounding guards turned towards me and saluted. It was rare for Dida not to be humorous. Although I was surprised by it, I was even more astonished by the sight that developed right before my eyes.

"Everyone, thank you."

After our short break was over, I climbed the carriage again. Through the gap of the curtain, I absentmindedly looked at the scenery outside. Just a little bit more and we would arrive at the fief.

Mounted on top of their horses, the other escorts rode side by side the carriage, enclosing it in a circular formation. ...For some reason, it was turbulent.

“...Milady...!”

All of a sudden, Tanya pulled me, making sure that my body is as far away from the window as possible. When I thought about it, I realized that the speed of the carriage has increased.

“...Presently, the escorts have engaged in battle.”

“Have you identified who the other party is...?”

“I did not get a good look. However, based on their equipment, they are not part of the regular army...”

From then on, we, who were riding the carriage, remained silent. Tension seemed to have filled the place. The carriage traveled as fast as possible to get away from the hustle and bustle.

Soon after, the carriage returned to its original speed before completely stopping.

“What happened?”

“Please wait for a little wait, milady.”

Tanya went outside and seem to have talked to Ryle.

“It appears that everything is in order now.”

“I see. Is everyone safe?”

“Yes. Would it be all right to call Ryle and ask for a complete report?”

“Certainly.”

I shifted my position slightly to get closer to Ryle's location. Although Ryle looked a little dirtier than before, there was no conspicuous injury; I felt relieved.

“Please excuse me for remaining mounted. Presently, we have annihilated the people who attacked us, and several people are conducting a search for survivors.”

The word “annihilated” weighed heavily in my heart. Especially to someone like ‘me’ who has been living in a safe country such as Japan. However, the delight I feel from knowing the crisis had come to past eclipsed worry. I hate to admit it but the present ‘me’ now lives in a completely different world.

“Is that so... Really, thank you very much. And so, how many were injured?”

“Several people are slightly injured. Nevertheless, it’s not to the point where the escorts cannot resume their duties.”

“It’s good if that’s the case... Now then, have you discovered anything regarding the people who attacked us?”

“No. From their equipment and their movements, they seemed to be ordinary bandits... As for why they aimed for us, it is uncertain if they target us due to being a company of nobles or if they were directly aiming for milady.”

Although it’s regrettable, bandits still exist in this country. This is especially the case at borders of fiefs where public order are not being actively maintained.

However, I wonder if they really were ordinary bandits. Were they being indiscriminate in kidnapping people and holding them for ransom, or was it because it was me... and they were hired to attack. If the latter was the reason, and it was the Queen and faction who hired those people, I felt that the attack was too conservative.

“Please accept my humble apologies. We would have originally kept one or two alive in order to conduct an investigation, but...”

“It’s fine. Considering the number of assailants, it would be difficult to arrest even just one. Now then, we aren’t that far away from the fief, right? Let us depart right away, aim for entering the fief by the end of today. I

will express my gratitude to everyone at a later time.”

Once more, the carriage departed. It seemed like the people who looked for survivors have returned.

...I want to return to the fief as soon as possible.

While being jerked inside the carriage, that thought float across my mind.

# Chapter 52: Restart and Reunion

...And thus, we finally arrived at the fief. Naturally we felt nostalgic after being gone for long, however, having reached the destination with no further incidents genuinely overwhelmed our hearts with a wave of relief.

“Welcome home, Milady.”

Led by Sebastian and Sei, every servant who stayed behind at the fief turned up to greet us as well.

“We are aware of what happened during the trip. By all means, please take your time and enjoy a good night’s sleep.”

“Thank you, Sebastian. Everyone too, thank you for your reception.”

I took up Sebastian’s suggestion without reserve. Probably due to the pressure continually built up along the way, I was thoroughly exhausted. Now that my mind has been calmed, it seemed like the burden was lifted all at once.

I headed to my room while being escorted by Sebastian. Upon entering, I took a shower, then changed into a more comfortable attire. Resting on the chair afterwards, I drank the herb tea prepared by Tanya.

“It has been a long day for you, Tanya. Please have a rest now. I am going to sleep right away.”

“As you wish.”

Tanya was also tired as expected, hence she willingly accepted my suggestion and retreated to her room.

Phew... letting out a sigh, my body quivered while I tightly embraced myself... Honestly it was frightening. Although I didn’t have to confront the assailant directly thanks to everyone... to be reminded of the fact that my life was targeted, even now, still make my blood run cold.

Nonetheless, just because it is frightening doesn’t mean I am afraid to make a move, and it would be ridiculous should I walk away from this. I need to find out about the origin of those bandits in haste, and there

would be a heap of things to study thence.

But for today, I should rest myself fully... and thus, I was in deep slumber soon after lying in bed.

Next morning, I woke up at the usual time. Getting asleep early last night, I thought I would be an early bird in the morning though... Well, I wonder if I was worn out that much yesterday. Thanks to that, I feel immensely refreshed now.

A perfect morning routine started with me practicing yoga, taking a shower then putting on some proper attire. Eventually I went to the dining hall, having a nostalgic meal in the fief after quite some time away.

“...Iris-sama!”

Rimé came in while I was enjoying the postprandial tea time. Even though she showed up to welcome me back yesterday, we hadn’t had an actual conversation so it was somewhat sentimental seeing her this time.

“Ah, Rimé. What’s the matter?”

“What’s the matter, you say!? I was worried to death! Thank goodness you are safe after all.”

“Thank you for your concern over me. As Rimé can see, I am perfectly fine right now, so please don’t cry so much like that.”

“But...”

While sniffing constantly, her tears just wouldn’t stop rolling down her cheek. Somehow it brings back memories... Rimé was also weeping hysterically like this the last time I went back home after having my engagement with Ed-sama broken off.

“I’m terribly sorry for making you so worried, Rimé. You can stop crying now... If you calm down, we are gonna have plenty of talk later on, okay?”

“O-Okay...”

...That’s right, calm down... It was not just Rimé’s feeling here though.

“...Milady.”

“Uhm, Sebastian. I will start working right after this. Though I have received your report by mail, it would be great if I can have a look at individual report of each department. I would also like to have an audience with the respective person in charge, if necessary.”

The top priority is to grasp the current situation as well as settlement of documents piled up while I wasn't here. Now that I am back in the fief, this is what I ought to do for the time being. Upon entering the study, what lies before me is a mountain of sorted documents placed on the desk.

“Well, I will take my time reading the documents first. Please come when I call.”

“As you wish.”

“Also, please summon Ryle and Dida for me as well.”

Those bandits from yesterday need to be investigated, and since the process will take time, I had better issue the instructions in advance.

I began tackling the documents after Sebastian left the room... How long will it take to finish examining everything, I wondered... Just when I was lost in thought for a moment, someone knocked the door.

“Come in.”

I had expected Ryle and Dida to show up, but the one arriving turned out to be Dean.

“Dean!”

I was mildly surprised by the appearance of the unexpected visitor.

“It has been awhile, Milady.”

“Certainly it is... During the time I was in the royal capital, you must have been here quite occasionally, I guessed? Thank you so much, Dean.”

“It is my pleasure. Leaving that aside, I have heard the news. Is it true that you got attacked on the way home?”

“...Yes. But where did you...?”



Don't tell me the rumor has already spread across the fief... I inquired Dean out of curiosity.

"It has become the talk of the town just late. For Milady to safely return is a wonderful thing to know."

Hence, I was slightly relieved upon hearing his response.

"Thanks to the members of the guards, we have made it somehow... By the way, I have a few questions for you Dean..."

"No problem. Since I want to report several matters as well, without further ado let's get down to business."

Our short-lived greetings thus ended. I asked Dean about some unclear points emerged from what I had been reading so far. It appeared that while I wasn't here, Dean and Sebastian were both in charge of running the business, so I felt truly grateful for him to stop by at this timing.

"...So, the land readjustment project in the fief's capital is completed. Regarding the family registers, we have finished drawing up every neighborhood within the fief's border, therefore what remains is only the cost of ownership for land plots outside the fief's capital."

This was the progress confirmation of the work implemented before I headed to the royal capital. Land ownership is a straightforward concept in the fief's capital, due to having a considerable number of residential plots here. Exchanging standard contracts when conducting real estate transaction has long become a common practice. However, if one were to deal with land outside the fief's capital, such convenience would diminish. It is not unusual for the kinds of rural districts to not have a detailed record of plot location and ownership.

"Exactly. For clarification's purpose, the east region is almost completed. As for the south region... particularly the cacao-producing villages. Since their land ownerships have already been sorted out when they signed contract with Azura Conglomerate, this will take only a bit longer... Problems are the west and the north region."

"Hmm... At this pace, there is no choice but to go and have a talk with

the citizens in those regions as soon as possible.”

“Yes. Currently, the public affairs department is putting their highest priority on the task. At the same time, they are also undertaking the creation of residency certification in the fief’s capital.”

“I see. Please proceed as planned from now on.”

As I was getting back to the mountain of documents, there was another knock on the door.

“Please excuse us.”

Entered the study this time were Ryle and Dida.

“We apologized for being late.”

“It’s all right, you two... Well then Dean, I’m sorry but can you step back for a while?”

The nature of the following conversation was not something that even Dean was allowed to take part in.

“No problem. In the meantime, I will carry on with the tasks as discussed with Milady earlier today.”

Dean quickly made his way out of the room.

# Chapter 53: With the servants

“First and foremost, once again allow me to express my sincerest gratitude. Saying thank you hardly seems enough now. Without everyone, I couldn’t imagine being able to return home in safety anyway.”

“Mind not, for what we bodyguards have done – as this guy said the day before – was a natural course of action given the circumstances. On the other hand, you appear to have slept quite soundly last night, princess.”

“Indeed, and you seem lively as well, Dida.”

The duo is in a better spirit today, and looks as though to have reverted to their usual expression – in the manner of how frequent Ryle giving Dida and his frivolous talk a dirty look. The fact that they managed to come back unscathed and currently stay in a safety zone with no imminent danger is something worth appreciating... Nevertheless, there is no greater feeling than seeing these guys have the chance to loosen up at long last.

“Well then, both of you. How about we move onto the main subject...?”

“You meant the background of those bandits from yesterday?”

“Apparently, yes. Frankly speaking, if that was Elria-sama pulling the strings from behind like Father had warned, I would deem it quite a harmless move though. Yet considering the timing of the attack, we cannot merely disregard the assailant as ordinary bandits.”

Elria-sama certainly can strike at me in her own ways without making use of those bandits. For example, she can effectively exploit her house’s political influence, or even abuse her position as the queen of the country.

Still, the timing was so peculiar that hardly anyone finds the attack completely unrelated. As far as I am concerned, this was more like pure rampage, rather than a calculated move orchestrated by a noble supportive of Elria-sama and her house.

“Regarding this matter, we have already launched the investigation with Tanya.”

“...With Tanya? It can’t be, since yesterday...?”

“That’s right. Last night, she gave directions to the servants in the mansion and try to look into the incident by herself, hence we also join in the investigation.”

When I recalled how quickly she retreated to her room the night before... surely you jest, she has been working non-stop ever since? Good grief, honestly when does that girl take a break, I wonder?

“I see... understood. Thank you for your continuous support.”

“Then, we will head back to work.”

As those two left, they went past Merida who was about to enter the room.

“Oh, Merida. It has been awhile.”

Because Merida was entrusted with the teahouse division of the Conglomerate, she has been keeping herself busy rushing from stores to stores all day, so it has been a long time since we last met at the mansion.

“I was informed that Milady had just gone through quite a troubling experience. Out of anxiety, I came to see you as quickly as I could.”

“Thank you. As you can see though, I am perfectly fine, don’t you think?”

“Indeed. Were you to get hurt, I would surely tear both Ryle and Dida apart.”

To such a Merida-esque remark, I couldn’t help but let out a laugh.

“And there’s one other thing. The new commodity Milady spoke of is now ready.”

“Oh, really? Did you bring it along by any chance?”

“Unfortunately, only the news for today. For I was hurried coming to the mansion and forget the item in question was fully my mistake. Next time, I will definitely show you when it is prepared.”

“I’m looking forward to that.”

The commodity I requested from Merida was a kind of dessert made using a type of vegetable gelatin, which can only be obtained through

trading with nearby countries.

“And what about coffee? When will we begin serving that beverage at our stores?”

While I was at the royal capital, coffee has finally been created. Incidentally, this is dandelion coffee since coffee bean has yet been discovered. From the perspective of a coffee addict in the previous world, they are slightly different somehow though...

“Let’s hold back for now as we still have a lot to do such as advertising. ‘Till it can be served in stores, I would be grateful if you can come up with desserts using coffee.”

“Understood. Anyway, I was thinking of having a temporary stay at the mansion after a long absent period, and will focus on the discussed problems in the meantime.”

“I will leave that to you.”

“Speaking of which, how was the royal capital you haven’t seen for a while?”

“...Even though I sort of expecting to be filled up with various emotions, in the end I didn’t feel anything at all.”

“...Nothing, you say?”

“Nothing. Naturally, I was both nostalgic and delightful when meeting with my friends and family. However, it seems like I have little sentimental attachment to the place called royal capital.”

“You must have felt quite relieved, I suppose?”

Merida smiled happily.

“Rather than feeling relieved... I wonder if it was because that place was not where the old me belonged.”

When I was brought back to life, I was in the middle of that incident – and before I can develop some sort of attachments to the royal capital, (un)fortunately I already came to the fief. As far as I am concerned, due to the dispute between Miss Yuri and the me holding the title of duke’s

daughter, the royal capital was plainly a suffocating experience.

“Fuun, was that really so?”

“That was how it is... To me, this is my home, and you guys here are my precious family. For that reason, I am happy with this outcome.”

“Hahaha, it is our utmost honour to receive such a compliment.”

After exchanging a few more words, Merida also left the room.

Thus, I went back to the documents.

...Tax revenue is excellent. Thanks to the increasing trade volume with foreign countries, the Conglomerate's profit has gone up as well. Furthermore, it seems like the sales of commodities made by the high school division is rising at a favorable pace. In any case, with more jobs created, the individual income has also been improved.

The construction of middle school division is now underway. Next in the list would be the infrastructure development of rural areas... Though the infrastructure in the fief's capital is so well-maintained that you wouldn't feel inconvenient, in rural areas there are a lot of places without access to water and sewer services.

As I was checking on each task's progress, signing, and making modifications as needed, there was another knock on the door.

“...Excuse me, there is something I forgot to report earlier. Since I'm going to leave today, can I have a moment of your time?”

# Chapter 54: Answer to the confession-like scouting

The person entering the room was Dean.

“Oh... Are you leaving already? You just arrived a short while ago though.”

“I’m afraid so. It was because this time, I actually slipped out of my house for a moment to come and report to Milady.”

“I see... Sorry for troubling you, Dean. Well, what was the matter you forgot to mention earlier?”

“...The children of the institution wished to see Milady. It seems that they wanted to show you their fruits of labor, after making preparation for a recital to be held at the academy.”

“A recital!? Now I’m curious about what they’re planning to perform!”

Speaking of which, I haven’t visited the institution for quite some time, even though I used to drop by around once every ten days before the trip to the royal capital.

“If I am not mistaken, there will be drama, drawing and singing. Apparently, the children will split into several groups to do the respective performance.”

“Oh dear... I’d love to attend the recital for sure. I will head there when everything is settled.”

Even though I really want to go to ease my mind, at this time such action would be unreasonable. Most likely, the bodyguards will not allow me to do so, and as for me, there is no way I am going to put the children in danger by my appearance.

“...By saying when everything is settled, I assumed you weren’t merely implying the fief and Conglomerate’s affairs?”

My mind was going blank for a while upon hearing Dean’s nonchalant remark... Aa, now that I have calmed down, isn’t this awkward silence the

same as a confirmation? I couldn't help but feeling regretful about my action then.

"If you don't mind me asking, why did you think so?"

Even though I know this was a futile attempt, I still inquired about his thought.

"To be honest, it was not hard to draw that conclusion, judging from the way Ryle-san and Dida-san making quite a serious expression when they entered the room. Coincidentally, I was reminded of the attack the day before by those bandits on Milady."

"...You've got a point."

Dean was sharp-witted as ever. Perhaps at this point, it would be unnecessary to continue keeping him in the dark.

"Furthermore, there was Milady's expression. Certainly, it was not a face you would show even when immersing yourself in the fief's affairs, nor the Conglomerate's... there was a sign of fear and uneasiness beneath, I concluded."

...I gave up. To think he can read a person's emotion that much, I feel like further objection would be meaningless.

"Tell me, Dean. Under those circumstances, why did you take the trouble to come here and let me know about it?"

It is not hard to figure out that the queen is my opponent, and if it's him he would immediately understand that I am in an unstable position. If he takes into account what happened thus far, it can't be helped if he decided to leave this place quickly, so for him to deliberately came here and talked about the institution's matter was a big question mark. Or is it, perhaps, the farewell gift after all?

"That is, of course, I was thinking if the situation around Milady got settled, how about we go there together?"

To such an unexpected answer, I couldn't fully grasp the meaning behind those words straight away.



“...Dean. Are you serious about what you have just said?”

“Am I? If not, I wouldn’t come all the way back and tell you though.”

“...I’d imagine in your case, you will get away from here as soon as possible.”

“Do you really think of me as such a heartless person?”

My eyes were wide opened as if being surprised by his remark. Did I just say something that strange?

“Blaming you heartless or such, there is no reason for you to stay here. To begin with, since every of your contracts so far is short-term only, you don’t help an obligation to stay afterwards. Besides, I’m positive that you can net yourself a high-paying contract at other places with ease. There is no need for you to expressly remain at an increasingly risky place like this.”

Of course, there is salary in his contract. By settling the fief’s affairs as my right-hand assistant, his salary is a little higher than a normal fief’s officer. Though higher to be said, the salary of a fief’s officer is not generous in the first place. As far as I am concerned, if we take income into consideration, the Conglomerate’s advisor’s is fairly high. The merit of a fief’s officer is that his income will be stable as long as the fief is not collapsed, though in his case, such merit would disappear since he is not in a permanent position.

I have no rights to force him to stay, and he can be on his own after the contract period ended. In other words, he can just choose not to come until the situation calmed down.

“...I didn’t know that Milady was holding me in such high esteem.”

Dean laughed as if trying to crack a joke, though I replied honestly.

“If not, I would not have entrusted you with the job so far.”

To those words I gave while sighing, Dean let out a smile.

“Well... certainly if job is the only criteria you’re looking for, then there is nothing challenging enough I have encountered up until now.”

What big words you're spouting... truly to give the opponent such an impression can only be Dean himself. Or rather, I was the one who thinks of him in this manner.

"Nonetheless, that would be extremely boring. Studying, then exercising, then what? Only by overcoming the hardships encountered along the way can one feel a sense of accomplishment. What I enjoyed had nothing to do with the subject's appeal or emotional attachment."

If I were to be put in his position, I would surely agree with his viewpoint. Even in the previous world, when I managed to achieve something that I thought to be greatly difficult, I did feel a great sense of accomplishment... although I can't understand the reason he decides to bring this up right now.

"...But I really enjoyed these days, since I came here. Because of Milady, who has original ideas that no one ever thought of before, and the excellent servants working with you. It has been a long time since I am eager to know what to do next, and what the result would turn out, hence it is interesting."

He walked from the doorstep in a steady pace, getting closer to my desk.

"That is why I am here. Although it started off as a one-off decision, I was gradually tempted to come back afterwards."

I watched the guy with towering figure approaching me. He was wearing an extremely delightful expression.

"It is natural for Milady to not put your faith in me. On top of me making only short-term contract, there are trustworthy subordinates who have been with Milady since you were young."

It is true that I trust them... or rather excluding Father and Mother, they are the only ones whom I can really trust.

"I won't say that I want you to treat me the same way as those guys. The time and memories they spent with you is something I cannot compete. However, Milady – it is my pleasure and my desire to be your hand and feet – even after the contract period ends."

“...Dean...”

“You don’t have to keep your distance from me. Even though our time together wasn’t that much... I have belonged to you since a long time ago.”

My face grew hot as I was hearing his words. Although it is always me who do those confession-like scouting on other people, it is embarrassing when I am on the receiving end.

After saying what is needed, Dean left the room.

Leaving behind me, still dumbfounded on chair for a while.

# Chapter 55: Suspicion and Notification

Two weeks have passed since I returned to the fief.

The investigation regarding the bandits is still ongoing, and I have almost finished looking over the documents that required my approval. Whenever I had free time, my mind would drift back to what Dean said and my mood would turn foul, hence I was fully concentrating on the job.

Today, I finished my work early, so I was heading to the library to take a look into the information sent by Father.

The library, though in the mansion, is located in another building different from which I reside in. Upon entering the atrium room, I was welcomed by lines of bookshelves so tall that they nearly reached the ceiling, which are brimming with various books.

“Oh, Milady? It has been awhile since you last came here, hasn’t it?”

As I entered, I saw Rehme.

“So this is where you are today, Rehme.”

“Yes, I came here since there are no classes scheduled for today. More importantly, what brings Milady to this place?”

“I am looking for information on the Reubens House.”

“You mean the House of Reubens the Duke? That is quite an unusual name I’ve just heard.”

“A Duke House? Why is thus name so unfamiliar...?”

“That is to be expected. It is a house founded by a prince of several generations before, with no fief to govern and only has a mansion in the royal capital. The last time they were a topic of interest was nearly thirty years ago, I believed.”

“Thirty years ago... Does it have anything to do with the Towair war?”

“Yes, you are correct. Since our country won, Towair sent a princess to marry into the royal family – however, at that time the former Queen was the one in power, plus the crown prince was too young for marriage and

the couple's large age gap made them not a good match. Furthermore, if the Towair's princess was taken into the royal family or a house having close ties with royal family, there would be problems regarding succession to the throne. Eventually, the House of Duke Reubens was singled out as the appropriate candidate. Their line would never ascend the throne unless the main line disappeared, and they certainly did have royal blood running in their veins... such were the circumstances surrounding the Reubens House."

...In other words, the current House of Duke Reubens have connections to the country of Towair, and thanks to the Duke's introduction, Miss Yuri Noir's mother was accepted to be an attendant in the royal palace. It is difficult to refuse someone with a reliable letter of introduction from a Duke House, especially when hiring servants requires sifting through a large pool of unknown applicants.

Even though the princess of Towair was forced upon them by a royal decree, had the duke rejected because of that, their reputation would surely be damaged.

Since we are talking about Father here, I'm confident that he has used the situation to his advantage and sent someone to monitor them.

Well, in any cases... the loose ends are connected to each other somehow. This is taking a turn for the worse. In short, the odds of Yuri Noir's mother having ties with Towair is quite high, and for Miss Yuri Noir herself to be influenced by her own mother – perhaps – is also a possibility not lightly disregarded.

After considering all evidences presented, I was strangely convinced of this conclusion. However, as Father had said, this is not my battlefield. To involve myself in political conflicts between nations is not something a lord of a fief would do... much less an acting lord I am. Especially at the time when one must secure a firm foothold, if I were to concern myself about such things, I will lose what I have worked hard to gain so far.

"Is there anything wrong, Milady? You are looking extremely pale."

"...I was just thinking about various matters, but I am fine now."

Yes, I am fine... I think? If it was Father, no doubt he would have collected further information and started fielding some countermeasures already.

If there is one thing I feel bothered by... I guess that would be about her existence. For argument's sake, let's assume she truly is a spy from Towair then. To come to the point, her plan has succeeded since she has been engaged to the second Prince... but if she hadn't, what would Towair do? I am sure there is no way they would gamble on her plan only, and if they did scheme something, they would have settled for alternatives besides her. Also, for a spy, her methods stand out too much unlike how a real one always trying to keep a low profile. Perhaps, my mind has been spoilt too much by the spy novels I read in my previous life? Regardless, her behavior does not match up with that of a spy for another country.

As I was thinking of this, I heard the pounding of footsteps approaching closer and closer. Then the door flew open with a bang.

"Be quiet in the library-!"

Rehme angrily scowled, but that expression lasted only a moment as she was taken aback by those making their ways in.

I turned my gaze to the people who entered and...

"Milady!! We have an emergency!!"

Sebastian and Tanya, who rarely lose their cool, are now looking desperate.

# Chapter 56: Outbreak of Incidents

“Tell me, what has happened?”

Naturally my voice also got strained. Just why these two came in haste with such desperate expression... hardly could it be due to some kinds of witless reasons, I suspected.

“It’s the Church of Darryl – they were going to pronounce an excommunication against Milady...!”

“Say what...!?”

To the turn of event which would not happen even in my wildest imagination, I involuntarily let out a scream-like voice.

My face was turning pale. A sudden wave of dizziness overwhelmed me as if I was suffering from anemia, and my heart was beating wildly inside my chest.

...In this country, the Church of Darryl is the official religion, with most of the population being affiliated as its followers. Strictly speaking, being regarded as representatives of God whom the citizens worship as the object of faith, the words of Darryl Church’s Pope and its Priests carry significant weight. At times, such can easily surpass the aristocratic authority.

As may be expected, it was set up so that the son of Darryl Church’s Pope should attend the academy reserved for nobles’ children only.

Meanwhile, a pronouncement of excommunication by the Church of Darryl means that the subject will no longer be recognized as one of its followers... or to be frank, they have been banished from the communion on moral grounds for good.

Almost every citizen in this country is a follower of the Church of Darryl. Conversely, non-believers in the eyes of the rest are referred to as merely “heretics.” Let alone being excommunicated, they are considered sinners to the Church as well as a public target of contempt.

For a noble’s daughter who should be a leading exemplar of the country

to be excommunicated... this isn't a matter on the level of giving me a bad name. It is something which should not have occurred in the first place.

Obviously, all credit and personal connections I have built up so far will also be gone.

To speak as an Earthling, perhaps this is rather similar to the event referred to as the Humiliation of Canossa. Without doubt, many would make use of this excommunication pronouncement to strike at me... just thinking of that already gives me a headache.

“The reason was?”

“For deliberately having a church destroyed. To disrupt the land devoted to God is an impudent act against Him, a sin which could not be forgiven... such were the reasons stated.”

“...For deliberately having a church destroyed...? Don't tell me, the land readjustment project...?!”

Certainly, I did destroy one of their churches. It was the building served as an orphanage where Mina used to live. Nevertheless, it should not be a trouble since that place is no longer in possession of the Church, a plot of land currently belongs to no one. Furthermore, we already have a plan to build another big church as a replacement though.

This was totally against me... no, the more I think of it, this pronouncement is an attack directed against the whole Armelia Duke House.

...Was that son of Pope – Van – the one pulling the strings from behind? Or perhaps, the Church itself orchestrating this incident? Or again, this being another ploy of the Second Prince's faction?

“As for the countermeasures... that's right, let's submit the construction plan and design of the new church to them. We need to clarify that it was not mere destruction, but a relocation of the old building to another place.”

In the meantime, our main concern is not to find out who did this. Certainly, it would be great if we knew their identities though... but for



now, our priority is the reality presented before us.

Rather than putting any effort to search for the mastermind, it is necessary to deal with the excommunication in one way or another... Surely, I must apologize Father and Mother for the inconvenience I've caused, as anxiety spreads through town the fief's affairs will stagnate, and damage to the Conglomerate will become immeasurable.

"Sebastian, please make preparation at once."

"As you wished."

Sebastian gave his bow, then immediately turned back, and left the library.

"And Tanya, what about your emergency?"

Nothing can surprise me at this point. Rather, I believe there is no such matter more devastating than having the Church declare you as a sinner.

"Milady, there are two things I want to report to you. First is the progress update on the investigation of the attack against Milady the other day."

"That is not important right now."

To put it bluntly, I don't have the luxury to listen to the progress report on that matter at the moment, even though my life was in danger back then.

"I don't think so, please listen to this, Milady. As I proceeded with the investigation, I found out that the fief, where the attack occurred, was in fact supporting the Second Prince's faction. Still, it is unknown whether that and those bandits have anything to do with each other though."

"I see. What's next?"

Unfortunately, even though under normal circumstances this would become quite a bombshell, the impact from the previous report was so great that Tanya's discovery seemed trivial at most.

"Yes, and here is the second report. That fief has announced an increase in trade tariffs and toll against the Armelia Duke House."

“...Say what!?”

Again, I involuntarily let out a scream-like voice.

...At any rate, the neighboring fief located at the north is the major route from our Armelia's fief to the royal capital. With the east side facing the sea and the west side totally occupied by rugged ranges of mountain, there is no choice but to make a detour should we choose to travel on southern roads to the royal capital located northwest. Inevitably, most of the exports from our fief had to pass through that northern neighboring fief to arrive at the royal capital.

“The reason was...?”

Nonetheless, that neighboring fief is small to begin with, having half of its northern area being just mountain. Moreover, since they have become an important point of trade, they have been putting more effort in developing inns and tourism rather than field cultivation – hence the number of arable land wasn't much and they have to rely on grain export from our fief. To think such circumstances have made me completely overlook this possibility...

“For their lord being an excommunicated sinner, is what they stated. And also, to protect our domestic agriculture.”

“To protect their domestic agriculture...!? They only have a few plots of cultivated land for such a huge population!”

Their food self-sufficiency rate is terrible, and without the affordable agricultural products from our fief, I doubt they can even manage to feed themselves... I wonder, is this an attack by the Second Prince's faction?

“How come... for both of these to happen at the same time...!”

With the announcement of the neighboring fief, the current situation has become dire. Other fiefs... especially those belong to the Second Prince's faction, would take advantage of this development. Besides, it is not only the export to the royal capital. The Conglomerate's process of getting new shops established in other fiefs will also be affected as well...!

Gradually, we are trying to expand the scope of commerce, not only to

the royal capital but also to other fiefs and foreign countries. That is, in case an internal strife occurs at the royal capital, we can still make good income out of the business.

However, it can't be helped if other territories decide to impose tariffs on our goods.

"Rehme, please do some research on how long the transport will take and the cost incurred should we switch to the alternative route from the south, then make comparison and report to me. And Tanya, please ask Moneda and Sebastian to come see me as soon as possible."

After Sebastian finished making preparation for the previous matter, we can discuss the impact of current situation on our fief's affairs. At that time, I will also summon the fief's main bureaucracy to the meeting.

"As you wished."

Tanya once again departed. I also left the room right afterwards.

I almost felt like collapsing on the way back, but still struggled to stand firm though... Now is not the time I can allow myself to pass out!

The road to the study is strangely long for me today. It would be great if everything happened so far was just a bad dream.

Nonetheless, cold sweats rolling on my cheek and back made me realize that this is the reality.

At any rate, I have to quickly return to the study...

# Chapter 57: Anxiety

... My head is spinning.

After being bombarded by so much information, I now have a headache. I massage my temples and pore over the documents.

After being notified of my excommunication from the Church, I gathered all the pertinent documents related to the rebuilding of one of the churches within my fief and gave them to Sebastian. The church had been so disheveled that it would have cost a fortune to have it repaired, so I purchased it at double the price and began efforts to rebuild a new one elsewhere. I had even consulted the Church before submitting the documentation required to have the church rebuilt. But before even conducting this process, I have made a visit to the Church but was refused at the doorway.

But, even after having jumped through all the necessary hoops, they have not rescinded the excommunication order.

“... How magnificently they’ve managed to sacrifice us for their own gain...”

“Yes. I used what connections we have to search for the priest who sold us the church building, but was unable to find him. I believe his affiliation with the Church has been severed and the letter Milady sent regarding the church’s demolition was ignored by the Church. I feel that... even if you possess the power of a duke, the Church will be able to limit the amount of information we can obtain. This will, no doubt, be a difficult investigation, Milady.” (Sebastian)

“Well, if we could find the priest of Kudan, we would be able to deal with this issue swiftly, but...”

I cannot just tell them to release all of the information we’ve gathered about the Church members. For Sebastian to regretfully say that he was unable to obtain information... I’m impressed that he was able to get this much information in such a short time, at all.

“How is our fief’s situation?”

“Although it has only been a few days since we were notified of the excommunication, anxiety amongst the people is rising rapidly.”  
(Sebastian)

“I thought as much. What about the merchants?” (Iris)

“There have been several merchants who have quit or suddenly taken a vacation. Fortunately, others who value their work more highly than reputation chose to remain, saying things like, ‘Work is much more important than some Church decree!’ We have been able to maintain our current level of production thanks to these devoted individuals.”  
(Sebastian)

It makes sense, I guess. For those who are unaware of the circumstances surrounding the demolished church, it would appear as though I demolished it without permission, and I would be someone who committed a crime against God.

It can’t be helped if some merchants quit or fled for their own safety.

“Trade has declined as well. The effect this situation has had on the fief is terrible.” (Sebastian)

The fief adjacent to ours just declared an increase in tariffs and trade restrictions to dampen our economy, requiring us to pay to sell within their fief and pay to cross their borders as well.

Because of these new regulations, businesses who are based in my fief are suffering heavy losses – just being based in my fief puts a business at a disadvantage. I have to solve this problem soon, or we will end up losing all the help we’ve received from various businesses.

Of course, this is also a problem for the Azura Conglomerate. I, who am the head of the conglomerate, have been officially deemed a sinner, and, now, people are wary of our products.

Additionally, we now have to pay increased taxes since we need to ship things directly to the capital.

Prior to my excommunication, I have not only received complaints from the nobility about the rising prices of our products, which I have attempted to assuage, but also from the common people.

There was also the issue of decreased sales of our products due to price increases caused by other companies poaching our store employees, especially from stores that are in the capital or experience a high amount of traffic. The loss of employees culminated in reduced production and our sales have declined from the resulting price increase.

That is why similar, if not the exact same, knock-off products had been cropping up in the markets. It wasn't as if I didn't anticipate that something like this would happen and prepare countermeasures, but with my excommunication, my preparations have been rendered useless. Now, since my excommunication has tarnished my brand's image, people are more likely to buy these knock-offs from seemingly more reputable companies.

“... I look terrible ...” (Iris)

I looked into a mirror in the study, and saw my appearance. The light from my eyes has disappeared. My hair is unkempt and my skin rough.

As someone who originally lived my previous life in Japan, I think that being excommunicated from the Church isn't a big deal... But, in this world, the Church is a powerful organization.

The influence of the Church reaches far and wide.

There is also the absolute name and authority that is God; the power of the House of Armelia pales in comparison.

It is impossible for us to negotiate with the Church, as they are an organization that wields absolute power and have long seized the hearts of the people. Even reaching out to approach the Church is difficult, as I am now a “sinner”.

Because of my excommunication, the second prince's faction has been taking this opportunity to harass my father incessantly, and any event that my mother was supposed to appear at has been cancelled or her invitation

rescinded.

I try to look up.

Ow, my head hurts....If I try to stand I get dizzy.

It has only been a few days. Then again, it has been a few days.

I have gotten almost no sleep lately, as I have been trying to keep up with the developing circumstances and think of countermeasures which we would then discuss and alter to match the current situation.

This is a battle against time. I am growing quite impatient, and I have been under extreme duress every single day.

I look back down, and immediately felt that my vision would grow hazy if I tried to turn around.

Just a bit more... A little more, and then my preparations will be complete. Though, even with said preparations, I am doubtful that I will be able to overturn this situation. The anxiety dwelling in my heart keeps asking whether this is a good option or not. Shadows have started to creep into my mind. My opponent this time is too powerful. If I had more time to prepare, I could ... No, even if I had predicted this, I would have had no other options.

# Chapter 58: Present

“...Are you all right, Milady?”

Sebastian and Sei are both entrusted to handle the fief's and Conglomerate's affairs respectively. Tanya is now in the middle of investigating the Church as well as keeping an eye on the royal capital's movement, while Ryle and Dida are working together to strengthen public order within the fief. Moneda is busy traveling back and forth between the bank and the merchant guild, and Rehme is lending Sebastian a helping hand with his tasks. Therefore, amongst the servants who see me on a regular basis, the only one available to pay me a visit at the moment is Merida.

As she entered the room, I raised my lowering eyebrows.

“...Am I looking all right to you?”

Putting on an exaggerated expression, I retorted with a sarcastic smile.

“Forgive my rudeness. The way I see it, you should take as much break as possible, Milady. Here, please have some chocolate and tea.”

“Thank you.”

I took a bar of chocolate. Yum, this was quite delicious. The effect soon spread over my head.

“Tell me, Merida. I wonder, aren't you receiving various job offers from other places too?”

“I guess that's true, given the fact that I am supervising the whole teashop line of the Conglomerate.”

Merida burst into laughter. It was quite refreshing to see such cheerfulness these days.

“Weren't there places with extraordinary terms as well?”

Merida had her eyes widened as if being surprised by my inquiry... nevertheless, she smiled again.

“...Right now, I couldn't care less about how others wish to have me. It is



all thanks to Milady that I was able to come this far. That is why I have no interest in any other places.”

“I see...”

“Besides, I don’t really want to see Milady getting crushed at this point.”

She broadly grinned.

“...I will try my hardest to meet your expectation.”

The preparation was almost completed, though we still lacked one final piece. Nevertheless, I will not go easy on the opponents this time, never will I. I will cut off their escape completely and drive them to the wall. Otherwise, they will take advantage of it and strike at me afterwards. For the sake of that piece.

“...Pardon the intrusion, Milady.”

As I was lost in deep thought, I did not realize that Merida had taken her leave, and before long, another character has turned up in her place.

“...Dean!!”

Despite myself, I cried out by the appearance of the unexpected character.

“W-Why are you here...?”

“To lend you a hand.”

“To lend me a hand, you say? You should have known our current situation better than any else, yet you still decided to come regardless of that?”

Although it is reasonable should one decide to keep their distances from a proclaimed sinner, for him to come here was simply unbelievable. It is on the same level as helping a criminal in Japan’s common sense.

In reality, a lot of people are leaving the Conglomerate, and even though I have withdrawn from the fief’s bureaucracy, letters of protest asking me to give up the position of fief’s acting lord are still coming everyday.

“Yes, certainly. Hence I was thinking if I am able to lend you a helping

hand though.”

“But, to lend a hand to a sinner? For all one knows, the Church of Darryl would even set their eyes on you. For you to purposely take such a risk... it just doesn’t make any sense at all!”

Isn’t this because of my fatigue or so... though I was calmer at the time with Merida, my tone with Dean was regrettably more aggressive. Though I realized it immediately, I couldn’t stop the words from leaving my mouth.

“It does make sense though. Haven’t I told you before? I have already belonged to you, Milady. If you cannot depend on me at such times, when would I ever be reliable to you?”

Hearing Dean’s blatantly obvious response, I was at lost for words in an instant.

“That...”

“Furthermore, not only can you depend on me, but I also have what you are seeking right now.”

I was speechless as he quickly handed over that and gave the following words. Don’t tell me, he had managed to secure the final piece, and moreover, to bring it here at long last. It was not even the feeling of surprise that crossed my mind, I was just deeply moved by the action.

“...So, what is your strategy, Milady?”

He was grinning deviously. Already knowing what my course of action would be, and yet still asking me about it, what an evil man he is.

“It is as you have expected... Furthermore, thanks to these that you managed to collect for me, all the pieces have started to fall in place.”

“That is a relief... And so, when will the opening ceremony be?”

“You certainly are well-informed... Geez, how did you know about that?”

“I just happened to hear about it along the road. It has become quite a topic of interest at the royal capital.”

# Chapter 59: Dissonance

“The ‘opening ceremony’ will be taking place tomorrow. But leaving that aside for now, Dean, you clearly made preparations for this situation already. How much of my plans do you already know?” (Iris)

Dean’s understanding of my plans had slight differences here and there, but was overall very similar.

He was aware of what I had done with the church and its demolition. He heard most of it from my side and various rumours that were floating around, and made his preparations based on the information he pieced together.

“I understand the steps you will be taking, but will you go out and meet that person with such a face?” (Dean)

“Such a face?” (Iris)

“You may not be aware of it yourself, Milady, but you look terrible right now.”(Dean)

No, you look terrible, I wanted to retort, but even I can’t refute his words.

“Everyone here has noticed, but, even though they are worried, no one has said anything to Milady out of consideration, which is why I wish to speak my mind here. I have heard many things about Milady, and, through my experience working directly with Milady, I became curious... Milady, whose engagement with the second prince was annulled, who now works hard for her people, and continues to work hard for her people in the midst of this storm... she has not cried once, nor has she shown signs of weakness, even in her voice. She continues to move forward with all of her burdens bottled up inside. Why is it that you try to be so strong?” (Dean)

“... You are wrong. I have not once tried to be strong.” (Iris)

Not crying... Being strong. Is that “Iris’s” will... or the me now? Fate is strange.

“Separating yourself from your feelings, are we?” (Dean)

No. Please, stop. I don't want to rely on anyone like that again. Please, stop cornering me. I bit my lip.

"My tears will resolve nothing." (Iris)

The words that came out of my own mouth were the words I least wanted to hear.

"... 'Tears will resolve nothing.' Hmmm. Although, I do agree with that statement, caging yourself in like that is much worse than crying. It is through tears that you will be able to break out of your cage and truly move on. You must face your feelings head on, even if they are dangerous, because it will give your heart closure." (Dean)

I cannot hold it in anymore... As soon as I thought that, all the emotions and feelings that I suppressed burst forth.

"Then, what do you suggest?! Cry in the corner and scream for help hoping for someone to come and help me?! Are you trying to tell me that crying and complaining will solve this situation!? You know as well I as do that nothing will happen...!" (Iris)

I want to stop, but my brakes are not working.

"I don't have the luxury to just drop everything and cry! Even with my engagement – It was painful and frustrating just how powerless I was!" (Iris)

Even though my love has since cooled down after the annulment, I can't say that I don't still think about it. I am worried about where I should go from here and frustrated at my previous hateful self. But crying will not give me confidence and have a sunshine over my head. So I gave up crying. I decided to instead use my head to negotiate with father.

Even after I arrived at the fief, I was still unsure of everything. In my past life, I was just a regular accountant that you could find at any tax agency. This is my first time I have to learn and deal with political strife and situations. I was always worried about whether my choices would actually improve my peoples' lives and if I would be allowed to implement policies. All these questions nagged at me.

“Even now, excommunicated from the church... me, a sinner... What the heck? What did I possibly do to deserve that kind of declaration?!” (Iris)

Drip. Drip. I can feel my tears falling.

“It’s hard. It’s so hard. Why? Why is this happening to me?! I just want to run away, scream, and shout, but...” (Iris)

I try to hide my tears with my hands, but they drip from my palms.

“And all this because of my useless self... My chest hurts when I think my people and their suffering. They have all tried so hard and done so much to build our fief... Because of me, all of them are suffering. I am so useless and pathetic... This is so painful.” (Iris)

Like mud, my words become messy and ugly, my emotions confusing the words that spill from my mouth. The words that came after had both my emotions and Impulse in them.

“If I cry and beg for help, will someone come to rescue me? No. I would just become a deadweight that should be abandoned. Even if I did reach out for help, as a member of the Armelia house, just being called a sinner affects everyone associated with me. Unless I can get them to retract that declaration, nothing will change. Until then, I would just be a liability.” (Iris)

Yes, even if I relinquished all of my authority and status to someone, as long as I am still a sinner who is excommunicated from the church, it will still affect the conglomerate and my family. That is how bad being excommunicated is. Even if I can’t erase having been called a sinner, at the very least, I need to get rid of that declaration.

“I’m trying to stay strong... Dean, you’re wrong. I am not holding back tears because they’re useless... I can’t cry, because... what if I get abandoned again?” (Iris)

I was afraid of becoming a burden. Even though I know it’s stupid to think that way, I still don’t want to lose everyone. I harbor that fear in my heart, because, maybe... just maybe it might happen.

“I am not trying to be strong... I’m just trying to look strong. But I

couldn't even manage that. I'm just a pathetic human being – that's what I am.” (Iris)

After expressing my feelings, my tears overflowed. This may have been the first time since I became Iris that I tried to express my disgusting and confused emotions.

“... Your display of strength is truly beautiful... but, please, do not lose sight of who you are in that façade. This is the wish of everyone who works with you. You not allowing yourself to be vulnerable or to take a moment for yourself... Given your position and past, this is something that can't be helped, but if you press on like this, you will worry the people who share your journey and you may lose your way. Please do not forget this.” (Dean)

Dean's expression as he expresses his true thoughts looks very serious. This even feels like one of the lectures my father used to give me. But I now understand the meaning behind those words, Father, and very painfully so. Thank you, Dean.

After a long time... well, after having cried so much, I would have fallen asleep where I was had Dean not caught me and told me to rest while indicating that he would handle the rest of today's work. If it weren't for him, I would still be working. This was the first time I slept so soundly; I fell asleep the instant I laid my head against my pillow.

The next morning, when I looked into the mirror, I saw that my eyes were still red. However, my complexion and heart felt refreshed. Now, it is time for the “opening ceremony”.

# Chapter 60: Preliminary Arrangements

“...I’m sorry for having you come here in this manner, Minae-san.”

“N-Not at all! Well... I was just doing what I am supposed to, Fief Lord-sama...”

In front of me was Minae-san, who was displaying an extremely grateful attitude to my presence... That’s right, I summoned her to my place as soon as the excommunication was pronounced. This was a preliminary arrangement to suppress the upcoming outburst of dissatisfaction among the fief’s citizens.

At first Minae-san was surprised, for she didn’t know that I am the daughter of Duke Armelia up until then. Moreover, when she learnt about the current situation from our exchanges thus far, her attitude became even more obliged. It was our fault... she thought. Foreseeing how this would turn out, I must have been quite a mean character to explain everything to her in this manner.

“I will be frank about the reason I called you here... I would like to ask you for a favor.”

“Y-Yes. What is it? I would gladly fulfill it as long as it is within my capabilities!”

“I may have to remind you of a certain bitter incident not so long ago. How should I put it...? I would like you to spread a story about the sold church. You see... it is sort of exaggerated. To say, the plot is: the place where the holy church was located – though used to be where we lived – was unfortunately sold to some bastards involved with human trafficking. We were threatened to leave and subjected to continual harassment. When Iris got wind of the situation, she arrested those bastards and relocated the tattered church – due to the harassment – to another location, then found us a new home. The new church was not opened yet though, but rumors said that there will be a grandiose opening ceremony soon. At that time, Iris will also make her appearance there.”

Hearing the content of my favor, Minae tilted her head in puzzlement.

“You want me to spread such a story?”

“That’s right. You probably will attract a lot of unwanted attention... no, eight to nine out of ten it would surely be. You will receive plenty of hostile and suspicious gazes, too. Even so, I want you to spread this to as many people as you can.”

“If that is the case, then yes of course! I will do lots and lots of talking from now on, and make sure that it will be heard and talked about in every corner of the fief’s capital!”

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Few days have passed since I asked Minae-san for the favor. The rumor has been spreading so wildly, to the point that no one isn’t being aware of it. Needless to say, not everything was good news – there were some skepticism and further rumors, and the original story was twisted with many variations through gossiping. Nevertheless, the main point was conveyed successfully. Plus, many people have shown interest in the opening ceremony of the new church.

As I was recalling of what happened thus far, my mind returned to the reality.

“You have my deepest gratitude, Minae. Just so you know, I am not the actual lord, just the acting lord of the fief.”

“I-Is that so...?”

“Please also keep my identity a secret from the children. If they start to call me Lady Iris when I come to play with them... somehow, I feel like there are distances between us and that will make me sad.”

“You will take your time to visit us again?!”

“Certainly. I am looking forward to seeing the children’s recital. Plus, I have yet given new picture books or telling them new fairy-tales, you know?”

“...Thank you very much, Lady Iris. The children are waiting for your appearance with joy.”



“I am happy to hear that... Therefore, let’s finish the business quickly.”

Having said so, I got off the horse carriage.

Today is the celebration of the completion as well as the opening ceremony of the new church. To ensure my participation go off without a hitch, Ryle and Dida – who were busy doing their tasks in various places – and Tanya are accompanying me as bodyguards at the moment.

In front of my eyes is the newly constructed towering church. Though it is supposed to be a sacred place, it gives off the atmosphere of a demon king’s castle where heroes head for... such is an exaggerated way I use to describe the building.

Well then, first of all, in order to settle the heart of the fief’s citizens, I should march into there.

# Chapter 61: The speech from a certain citizen's perspective

Dusk was usually when most people would be crowding into taverns, but, today, everyone was heading towards the newly built church. I know the church is new, but I feel like there's a bigger reason for this.

As I head towards the church, amongst the masses of people, I see many nobles and influential people in their carriages or walking with their guards, including the presidents of large companies and the village chief, moving in the direction of the church. There are also commoners like me. I especially notice outsiders from the capital among the crowds.

I was able to arrive early and get a seat inside, because I live rather close to the new church. The new chapel is large, but, even with its enlarged size, it could not hold everyone who was coming to see what was going to happen. There were people looking in from the windows and the doors were left open to allow people who couldn't find a seat in the chapel to see the events.

The declaration from the Church that our fief's lord was excommunicated from the Church was hard to swallow and made everyone, including me, anxious about the future. I heard that today the lord would explain why they were excommunicated, so many of us came to listen.

There is another reason why people are here: a rumor about the orphans at the nearby orphanage. Rumor has it that the lord protected the orphans from slave traders and bought the old church from them in order to give the orphans a place to live. I, myself, have met those orphans and their caretaker, Miss Minae, because of my job as a merchant. When I heard that rumor, I went directly to Miss Minae to confirm it. However, whenever I went and called for her, she was never there. I talked with Miss Minae and the children rather often in the past, so when I heard the rumor, I felt both anger at the slave traders and sadness. I do believe it to some degree, as I understand that someone must have helped them, but

whether or not our lord did it is iffy. My impression of the lord is that they wouldn't go so far as to help children at an orphanage.

While thinking about these things, I saw a priest at the altar kneeling and praying to god. At the same time, the sound of the pipe organ echoed and a beautiful melody started playing. I felt my heart beat with its melody.

As the priest began his prayers, we all joined in.

Shortly after, the sermon started.

“God loves all of his children. God wants all his children to be understanding of one another. By helping one another, one can live a life with dignity, and by accepting the love of god, one can show humility and live with pride. God has taught all his children the value of the connection we have with others.” (Priest)

The soft and kind voice of the priest rang throughout the chapel.

“However, God also helps those who are willing to repent for their sins. God cherishes all his children and bestows forgiveness to those who repent and rectify the mistakes they have committed. We as God's children must see with hearts unclouded and judge that which is evil and that which is just. We must reach out to those who are truthful and right and offer help to those who have wronged. I pray for those who have committed sins to accept the love of God and atone for the error in their ways.” (Priest)

After the priest finished his prayer, the chapel became noisy and tense. Were these words directed at the lord of the fief?

As the priest walked away from the altar, we thought the ceremony would be over. However, a girl took his place.

She was wearing a pure white dress with no decorations or designs. Rather than being called a dress, it was closer to a nun's habit. But, even while wearing a plain white dress, her figure was so beautiful that any man would immediately fall for her.

“Hello, everyone. I thank you for coming to the opening ceremony of this

new chapel.”

Her voice was clear and, as she bowed, she fit the image of the perfect lady... I feel like I've seen her somewhere before...

Who is that woman? Murmurs ran throughout the audience. I also heard someone call her “Alice”... the origin of that voice was from a commoner like me.

As if she heard our questions, she answered.

“My name is Iris. Iris Lana Armelia. I am the daughter of the Duke of Armelia and the acting lord of this fief.”

As soon as she named herself, there was an uproar... Well, of course, there would be. This person was excommunicated by the Church, so her presence at the new church was a big surprise.

“Everyone, I am aware of the question you must be asking now: Why am I here in this sacred place of God when I have been excommunicated? Please do not worry. I have received permission from the priest, himself, to stand and speak before you all today. I ask the same of all of you as the Father before did. Please, everyone, listen and decide what is right and wrong with a heart unclouded.”

Her voice, atmosphere, and tone were dignified. She seemed like a being of the chapel itself. When she started speaking, the noise and whispering stopped, except for the whispers of just a few people on the side.

“Our fief is rich and the people follow the teachings of God with all their heart by treating one another with love. But not all people accept these teachings and not all people can receive them due to the circumstances of their environment.”

She clasped her hands together in prayer and raised her voice slightly.

“I met such people; they are the orphaned children. These children were blessed for some time with a servant of God who cared for them – a sister that taught them the teachings of God and the world. But, as with all life, this beloved servant of God left this world and returned to our Holy Father. Since the land was unpaid for and seeing as no one visited the

chapel anymore, the Church sold that land. The children were then left to fend for themselves. The people who bought the land were fiends and rejected the teachings of the Holy Father. These children, who were innocent and undeserving of such cruel treatment, were left in the hands of those fiends. I know that many of you here know these children and can agree that they are all pure and wonderful.”

Throughout the chapel, I could hear people saying things like, “I know them,” “those children are wonderful,” among other things. I also feel that way, since I know them well.

“That we did not notice the plight of these children earlier is our sin, but after having discovered their circumstances, I could not turn a blind eye; The teaching of our Holy Father obligates me to protect them.”

While she spoke, she started to gently shed tears. The sight of her right now is as if God had painted her himself.

“I do not want to repeat the mistake of not having noticed their predicament sooner. Thus, in order to keep them safe, I decided to construct this new chapel. These children are the key to our future – they embody my determination to keep the future for everyone here brilliant. The Church declared that my sin was the demolishing of a church, but I did it to help these children and keep the future bright for all of us. Is that wrong? Should I have abandoned the Holy Father’s most important teaching that we help one another? Should I have left the fiends to vandalize the forsaken church? Would that have been the right path to take?”

Her tone of her voice suddenly became full of sorrow and a mixture of other emotions. I felt my heart throb with her words. If what she said was true, then what is a sinner? If she is a sinner, then everyone else in this world would be a sinner, right?

“I am but a humble and pious disciple of God... However, I am also a lord who must protect her people. God is watching and giving us opportunities to better ourselves, but these opportunities mean nothing if we do not reach out and grasp them to obtain happiness. God does not

send us happiness but gives us opportunities to pursue it. Everything depends on our actions and will to act. Those who think that evil is unavoidable and take part in evil behavior are wrong. Those who see evil and wrongdoings but do not act are also wrong.

There are many people here who knew those children, who treated them well, but did not notice the trouble they were in – Even I did not notice their dilemma until it was almost too late. I am but a single individual; I only have two eyes, ears, hands, and feet, and there are but few places that these feet can walk to nor things my hands can grasp. However, I have people who support me as a lord and I have the support of you fellow children of God which allows me further my reach and help those in even the most remote of places. I beseech you: help me protect you. Help me protect the weak and help those in even the darkest of places. Help me give those people a richer and healthier life. Please... lend me your strength.”

As she ended her speech, a few claps resounded through the room and grew until the applause became a roar. I could even hear clapping from outside.

I felt that, if I follow this person, we could live a better life. If it is this person, then, no matter who the enemy may be, she will pull us through hard times. I do not have any evidence, but I felt this in my heart. The atmosphere of the chapel became much better, and I felt that hope was in the air.

“... I bestow upon you the blessing of our Holy Father.” (Priest)

The priest blessed the lord of the fief and, as she kneeled down to receive his blessing, the priest placed his hands on her head. She then stood up and turned around to face us with a smile.

I thought from the bottom of my heart that I was glad I came and caught a glimpse of her.

# Chapter 62: Going To The Capital Again

Propaganda:

“Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view.”

The speech and performance I gave was exactly that. I used Miss Minae to do some legwork for me by spreading the story. The speech I then gave connects those rumors to me. This is a textbook maneuver used by every politician in my previous world.

There was a quote by Adolf Hitler:

“The receptivity of the masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous. In consequence of these facts, all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these in slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan.”

All the things and acts done as part of this performance of mine – the priest’s opening prayer, doing the opening ceremony at twilight – was to give the chapel the right lighting and ambiance; everything was to make my speech more effective.

With this speech, I should’ve soothed or at least calmed down the citizens of my fief, so I can now leave the fief for a while. I have to go back to the capital to resolve the main problem now.

Even so, I still have a lot on my mind.

I am thankful to Dean; because of the two letters he brought, I was able to conduct the opening ceremony peacefully. I was also able to get the cooperation of the priest because of one of those letters. The other letter is the key to solving this whole mess. I was going to ask either Father or Mother to obtain it... but how did Dean obtain... Dean who are you... It can’t be...

“Milady, are you alright?”(Ryles)

While I was lost in thought, Ryle asked me in an anxious voice.

“...Oh, I am fine...”(Iris)

“Please hang in there a bit longer. We will be there shortly.”(Ryles) I am currently heading to the capital. You may be wondering why he is asking if I am alright. Well, this is due to the fact I am not on a carriage, but on a horse. We have to go to the capital as fast as possible, so the best option was to go on horseback. I thought I would be fine, but, oh god, it is rocking too much. No, I am not directing the horse. I am still not capable of that. Ryle has the reins.

I was sure I would be able to handle this, since I have ridden a horse before, but I guess riding for elegance and actually riding to get somewhere are two totally different things. I miss having my feet on the ground so much...

I was accompanied by Dida, Tanya, and some guards in case of an attack. I asked Dean to accompany us, but he had said he had urgent business and could not come with us. He instead proposed to join us later. Unlike me, everyone was smoothly riding a horse. I wonder when Tanya learned to do it... Only I am the burden here.

... I tried by best not to vomit, and we somehow made it in time. I arrived at my manor in the capitol. When I got off the horse, I was wobbling like a newborn fawn and could barely stand.

“Welcome Home, Milady.” (Servants)

All the servants came to greet me, as I haven't been back in a long time.

“I am back, Father, Mother, Bern... I sincerely apologize for the trouble I have caused you this time.” (Iris) My entire family came to greet me at the entrance as well. Although unexpected, I was grateful for it. My appreciation, however, was not enough to stop my wobbling.

“You arrived very early. Are you okay?”(Louis)

My father, seeing me like this, showed a worried expression, and asked if I am alright.

“Yes... somehow...”(Iris)



“Rest your body for now. We will talk later.”(Louis)

“Yes. Thank you.”(Iris)

From there, I was guided by Rime to my room to rest for a while. Then, I was called for tea in the living room. The atmosphere, however, made it clear that I wasn't called just for tea, since all my family members were present.

“Again, please let me apologize for the trouble I have cause this time. I am truly sorry.”(Iris) I apologized to everyone for trouble.

“No, there no need for you to apologize. You have done nothing wrong. Even I did not expect Daryl to go this far.” (Louis) “But...”

“No buts. There is nothing you are at fault for.” (Mellice) My heart started to be healed from the kind words of my father and Mother.

“Well, we are ready for the party they are about give. The other side is strong, and, since they picked the fight, we do not need to hold back anymore.” (Mellice) “Yes... Oh yes, Dean entrusted me with a letter to give to you, Mother.”(Iris) “Oh. Please give it to me.” (Iris)

My mother received the letter and started to read it immediately. By the time she finished reading the letter she let out a slight laugh.

“What did he say?”(Iris)

“No, it is nothing important. He is just apologizing for using my name without my permission to get the information you needed.”(Mellice)

“Using Mother's name... the effectiveness of that method is close to a royal decree. Even now, I hear screams and shouts to Mother for opting out of any and all charity events held by the church. Because of her not being there, all other parties connected with her, which is basically most nobility, did not attend either.” (Bern) What Bern said is correct. For Mother to be absent from any event means that such an event will be terrible or be a waste of time. I am sure it is quite painful to the Church, but then...

“– but is it alright? Would the Church not attack Mother as well?” (Iris)

“No, everything is fine. We are still donating to the Church. I also

responded by letter that the reason I would not be attending is due to the fact that having the mother of a daughter who has been excommunicated go to such parties would only serve to dampen the mood.” (Mellice) I smiled at my mother’s straightforward answer.

“Well, I am sure this matter will be settled soon, and I will have to attend a party. That was one of the conditions outlined in Dean’s letter.” (Mellice) “What do you mean?” (Iris)

“No, nothing. It is funny. I was used as a bargaining chip by Dean. He used my name to negotiate with the Church to retract Iris’s excommunication. Either way, I am fine with it as long it helps you, my dear.” (Mellice) ... Dean... You are bold to have used Mother’s name during negotiations and report about it after the fact. I know my mother says it is alright for my sake, but this makes my head hurt.

“Dear Sister, I have something to report to you.” (Bern) Bern started to talk to me.

“Oh? What is it?” (Iris)

“This case of excommunication... Van is not involved.” (Bern) “So, are you telling me I should forgive him?” (Iris)

Bern shook his head when I said that.

“No... I have reliable information that the one who is the mastermind behind this is the pope himself and the merchant Count Monroe has been seeing lately.” (Bern) “You are saying that the merchant is the true mastermind behind this incident?” (Iris) “Most likely... Although the pope does have significant power, I highly doubt he would go against the house of a duke. I also have asked Van about this matter, though, as expected, I could not outright. I had to use roundabout conversation and indirect questioning to get the information. From what I have heard from him, the merchant and the pope met often at the Count’s manor prior to your excommunication announcement.” (Bern) “Hmm... Father, that merchant...?” (Iris)

“Do not worry. We are already investigating him.” (Louis) As expected of Father. Also, hearing that Bern took action out of concern for me made

feel a little touched.

“How about the second prince’s involvement?” (Iris)

“No, he is not involved in this case, but....” (Bern)

“Is there something?” (Iris)

“Apparently it is hard for the person himself to say... but he did not find it amusing that you have started to support the first prince. He complained a lot to me about this; it was quite insufferable... Anyway, after hearing about Sister’s excommunication, he started to have people move and start to take employees from your store and the Conglomerate as retaliation... What did I ever see in him?” (Bern) “Wow... I’m at a loss for words...” (Iris)

What did I ever see in him? He is such a small man. Nevertheless, I need to be vigilant, as the conglomerate’s sales have been falling. I’ll have to address this problem later.

“Bern, thank for all you have done. Please take care of yourself.” (Iris)

“No thanks needed. I am just helping out family.” (Bern) “Now, Iris, let us have dinner. Afterwards, please rest. Tomorrow is the real battle and we will achieve nothing less than a perfect victory.” (Mellice) “Yes, Mother.” (Iris)

Well, the party tomorrow will be our battlefield. The previous founding party also made me tense, but I was not in danger then. This time my destiny is at stake. Losing is not an option. The biggest game of my life is about to start.

# Chapter 63: Departure

I get ready and put on my dress. I will be heading to the royal palace today. As with my previous speech, I choose to wear clothes that are not decorative or gaudy and go with a simple outfit.

The reason I am going to the capital is because an inquiry meeting will be held to explain the reason behind my excommunication to my father. This is a very serious matter, as this meeting will decide my fate. The reason my father will be hearing the explanation is because he is the head of the household. If I were to use office terms, my father would be my boss in this department, and the CEO or upper management is calling my boss to explain the situation.

They will also be deciding on the appropriate punishment... At best, they will acknowledge the excommunication as a mistake and retract it. At worst, I will be imprisoned or receive the death penalty. This meeting requires the presence of the culprit, their family, an inquiry committee, and spectators. Since this concerns the nobility and a high member of the nobility, at that, there will be many nobles who are expected to participate in and watch the proceedings.

My escorts for this, as usual, are Ryle and Dida

People are already gathered for the proceeding... In truth, this time, I was not invited; my excommunication stripped me of my noble status, but, with special permission from the queen, I was permitted into the royal palace.

We advanced through a pre-set route that the queen informed us about and tried to avoid the gazes of people. Ahh... I feel unwelcome... Well, I guess I am an intruder, since no else knew I would be attending.

“Duke of Armelia, as a father who could not supervise his own daughter and prevent her foolishness, are you even capable of properly managing the country?” (Ellia)

That voice... Is that the second wife of the King, Lady Ellia? From what she said, it seems she wants my father to quit being the prime minister...

Is she blaming my father for what happened?

“Can you imagine the shame our country bears having its own prime minister’s daughter excommunicated as a sinner? Are you incapable of properly raising your daughter?” (Noble 1)

“First, he is an incompetent prime minister, but now we see he’s failed as a father as well... Haaaaa...” (Noble 2)

The nobles supporting Lady Ellia started to voice their complaints against Father. Soon, murmurs of agreement began to go around the room. The air was so corrupted that I could see its filth.

“I have never told my daughter what to do.” (Louis)

My father’s low voice silenced the audience.

“So, are you saying that because you were not the one who told her to demolish the church, you bear no responsibility? How pathetic.” (Ellia)

Lady Ellia laughed haughtily and raised her voice.

“Everyone, did you hear that? Listen here. Before you are the prime minister, you are the Duke of Armelia. Any actions and operations that are carried out in your fief become your responsibility and your sin. Do not fall under the illusion that you can escape.” (Ellia)

Her statement held various meanings: She wanted him to abdicate his role as prime minister and relinquish the fief. The nobility seemed completely supportive of this, as our fief is the most prosperous in the kingdom and rich with resources. If they were to split it amongst the neighboring fiefs, there is no doubt that they would profit greatly.

Lady Ellia’s words caused an incredible stir. My father turned to give the audience a cold stare and they immediately fell silent. As expected of Father.

“I am not denying my culpability. I have never guided my daughter’s actions for one reason: I trust her wholeheartedly. I have sent her to act as lord of the fief and, as her father, I am proud to have seen her accomplish so much. Yes, I am the prime minister. Yes, I am the Duke of Armelia.

However, before that, I am first and foremost a father. Thus, I placed my trust in my daughter and saw no need to supervise her actions.” (Louis)

“... Thank you, Father.” (Iris)

I thanked Father, even though I was sure he did not hear them. His words filled me with courage – the courage I needed to enter that room.

My hands trembled from fear and anxiety, but, after hearing that, my apprehension disappeared in an instant. Although his words reached me, I am not physically present in the audience room, nor am I peeking through a doorway; I am in a hidden room within the castle which leads to the audience room via a complicated pathway.

The guard who was in front of the door noticed me and became flustered. However, he calmed after I showed him the queen’s letter and obediently let me into the room.

As they opened the door to the audience room, I walked into the greatest challenge of my life.

# Chapter 64: Inquiry Meeting

The moment I opened the door, all eyes turned to me, and, when they realized who I was, the gallery of nobles went up in an uproar. The only ones unaffected by my arrival were my father, the Queen Dowager, who knew I was coming, and the priest, Christopher.

I proceeded to walk to the back. The room was filled with nobles and other dignitaries. The back of the room was designated for royalty, and the only people sitting there now were the Queen Dowager, Lady Ellia, and a representative from the Church.

Everyone's gaze pierced me like needles, and I felt my hands tremble even with my father's words of encouragement.

It will be fine. I have to think this way. Even when I tried to clench my hands to stop my shaking, it wouldn't stop.

It felt like it took me a long time to reach the back of the room, but, in reality, it was only a minute. Thankfully, I managed to get there alright, but, on my way back, I glimpsed a certain person.

Priest Christopher is a thin, intelligent man who wear spectacles. His face was expressionless, but I felt his gaze was different from everyone else's.

It was a gaze that said, Will she succeed or will she fail and disappear into oblivion?

The moment I felt his gaze and identified him, my hands stopped trembling. That priest is the person who has connections to that man who helped me get that piece of evidence.

I will not disappoint you. I will respond to the trust that you and everyone else has placed in me.

I walked up to my father and stood beside him. I directly faced the vacant throne that stood betwixt Lady Ellia and the Queen Dowager. The representative for the Church sat a little bit in front of them.

"... Why are you here?" (Ellia)

Lady Ellia stared at me coldly.

“I felt it necessary for me to explain and report the actual details of the situation.” (Iris)

“There is nothing more for you to report or explain. The fact that you have destroyed the hallowed place of the Lord will not change. This meeting is not for you but instead for your father, who will take responsibility for your actions as the Duke of Armelia.” (Pope/Church Representative)

These words came from the Pope of the Church of Daryl who was the father of Van, one of the second Prince’s cronies.

“Iris Lana Armelia, you are charged with the crime of destroying a sacred house of the Lord without consulting the Church. This is an insult to our Lord and the conduct of a nonbeliever. The Lord is deeply saddened by this action that was carried out by one of his children, let alone one holding the status of a noble.” (Pope)

“It is exactly as you have said: A sacred house of God was demolished. This act clearly signifies your refusal to speak with the Lord.” (Ellia)

The color of mockery was reflected in the eyes of the Pope and Lady Ellia.

“Yes, I do agree with that sentiment. However, much more egregious is the story of how the sacred house of God was sold for profit. Would you like to hear it?” (Iris)

“What are you trying to say, little girl?” (Ellia)

Lady Ellia laughed through her nose, but hid her face behind her fan.

“Even if you ask me that, I meant exactly what I said.” (Iris)

“I am asking, because the meaning is unclear, little girl. Destruction of a sacred place is evil. Thus, transferring the grounds to others is better... There is no such thing as... Both acts should be considered an insult and treason against the Lord.” (Ellia)

“Yes. I am in agreement with Lady Ellia. As it turns out, this did indeed



happen. I have the contract of the sale of that land in my hands right here.” (Iris)

I pulled the contract out of my purse and offered it to the Queen. This was the deed for the land that the church was once on. It contained the name of the seller, the Church, and the buyer, the human trafficking ring.

The gallery of fools who were previously noisy fell quiet. I think they now want to see who will win this case... Although... The second prince’s faction remained noisy.

“I was shocked to see that the sacred land of the Lord was sold! It is as you say, Lady Ellia, the sale or even the thought of selling the land of the Lord is outrageous. However, this transaction was conducted and the land was sold after the original manager died. The priest who signed the receipt for the deed has his name written here. How do you intend to explain this?” (Iris)

“What stupidity! There... There is no priest in the Daryl Church who would be so stupid as to sell the Lord’s land. This is a felony and an affront to the title of ‘priest’!” (Ellia)

“I am in full agreement, my Lady... I also believe that no one in this country would conduct such an act. However, it is a fact that this buyer and seller combination had planned to attack the Sister, vandalize the chapel, and sell off the orphans living there.” (Iris)

“What nonsense do you speak of?! It is impossible for someone who serves the Lord to do such a thing... Has your family fallen so far as to stoop to deception? This is quite disappointing.” (Ellia)

Lady Ellia made attempts to deny my words and ridicule my family.

“I understand your disbelief, my lady, but, as you may know, I hold the position of temporary lord of the fief. My father granted me this title and I have conducted my duties on his behalf. I have done many things as the acting lord of the fief, including government reform, tax auditing, trade route establishment, and, lastly, oversight of land transfer and transactions.” (Iris)

“... And your point is?” (Ellia)

“We record the state of properties of the land, of course, and I have visited all of the properties with a named owner. I have also visited the church to ensure that it rightfully belongs to the person on the deed. It was stipulated at the time that the land the chapel was on did not belong to the Church, meaning that the Church no longer owned that land anymore.” (Iris)

It was quite unexpected, but it worked in my favor that I was able to advance the clarification of the land ownership early on.

“I was astonished to find that the Daryl Church themselves said they did not own that land, even though a chapel stood there. I have, in hand, the letter with the aforementioned correspondence as well.” (Iris)

I raised the letter again so that everyone could see the lower part of the letter with the names of the priest who was involved.

“As one of God’s children and acting lord of the fief, I was surprised that there was no chapel in my city. Thus, I decided to demolish the old one and build a new chapel to provide my people with a new place to worship the Lord. I had also informed the Church and kingdom officials of this decision and its subsequent transactions. I have with me the letter from those individuals, as well.” (Iris)

“This case is with the officials of the kingdom then... But you still do not have evidence that the Church was informed as well. I will say this now: This work of selling God’s land may be the work of a person who falsified the Church’s name and signatures. It is entirely possible that someone conspired with you to create all these documents, is it not?” (Ellia)

Lady Ellia asked stiffly and demanded evidence of the Church’s involvement.

“If what you say is true, then any transaction or deal with the royal palace or kingdom officials would also be meaningless. You are insinuating that any man, woman, or child can use the seal of the royal palace to commit fraud. Is that acceptable? If so, then all of the transactions and deals by the royal palace should be nonexistent, right,

Lady Ellia?” (Iris)

I retorted back. Lady Ellia shut her fan loudly with displeasure and spoke.

“How amusing. However, I will not retract my previous suggestion... Unless you have evidence to prove that the Daryl Church did actually do this. Any further talk from you is meaningless unless you provide it. Stand do—“ (Ellia)

As she began to tell me to “Stand down”, I cut her off.

“If you are asking for evidence, then I have it here in my hands.” (Iris)

# Chapter 65: The Last Piece

I produced a book browned and worn with age.

“—No... That is...!!!!” (Pope)

Most people were unaware of the significance of the book I just took out and began to ask about what it was that I was holding... All but two people, of course.

They were Priest Christopher and the Pope, since it is expected that they're familiar with this document.

“All the priests of the Church know what this book is; it is a book that contains the names and signatures of all of the servants of the Lord.” (Iris)

Even if it is the Church, they are still an organization. Priests do not live on holiness alone and need money to support themselves and their families. As such, their transactions must be recorded. This book is a book of accounts and contains the names of all who serve the Church.

All of the priests' names are recorded here, including the one I corresponded with regarding the chapel I demolished.

“This book also contains the names of those who signed the contract, those who I made inquiries to, and those who I questioned regarding the matter of the chapel. I was surprised to find them in this book and to discover that they were such high-ranking members of the Church.” (Iris)

“... Why?! You... Are... You...!” (Pope)

The Pope stared wide-eyed at the book, and his eyes seemed as though they would explode from their sockets.

This was my decisive piece of evidence. No matter what other evidence I could bring or even if I could convince the entire nobility to side with me, this was the most crucial. The Pope and Lady Ellia would not admit defeat if the evidence were not this conclusive.

Thus, this evidence will silence them all.

“I have no idea how you obtained that, but, as Her Majesty indicated

earlier, this may have been falsified unless you can show something that proves it to be a genuine article of the Church. If not, then continuing this discussion is pointless.” (Priest Ralph Christopher)

Priest Ralph Christopher said this even though he was the one who provided me with this book. It seems he feels this will be my victory. Lady Ellia took the bait Priest Ralph Christopher set out almost immediately.

“Priest Ralph’s words are right. We must determine whether this document is real.” (Ellia)

“If it needs to be proven as genuine, then may I ask Priest Ralph to determine its legitimacy?” (Iris)

As I said that, I approached Priest Ralph with measured steps. No one attempted to stop me as I handed the document over to Priest Ralph.

He quickly leafed through the pages and looked intensely at the last page.

“... This is...” (Priest Ralph or Christopher)

Then, as if surprised, he returned the book... I must say that this person is an excellent actor. I wonder why he became a priest instead of a politician...

“Yes... This is without a doubt a document of the Church.” (Ralph)

He muttered and trembled as he spoke. His voice carried throughout the room and every priest began to gather around him... Really... Even I do not have this level of acting ability.

“Why can you...?!” (Priest A)

“Here. You may verify it as well.” (Ralph)

At his words, he passed the book to another priest. This passing of the book continued for a while until it finally reached the hands of an elderly sister.

“Quickly tell us if this document is real or not.” (Ellia)

Her hands began to quiver and her face contorted in anger. Now SHE is a

horrible actor.

“Yes, your Majesty... This book contains on the last page the seal of the Cardinal and the Pope. These are both special seals that cannot be made without special materials known only by the Church in order to prevent forgery of important documents like this one. This document is indeed genuine.” (Elderly Sister)

The Cardinals’ and Pope’s seals. There are five cardinals and one pope that make up the highest-ranking members of the Church.

“It is as she said, Lady Ellia. This document is real. Furthermore, I believe all will be solved after hearing the testimony of these two individuals.”  
(Iris)

At my last word, the door swung open and two men were led in by Ryle. They were the two priests... or should I say, “former priests”? We used the full extent of the Duke of Armelia’s power and found them by exhausting Tanya and her vast network of connections.

# Chapter 66: Witnessess

“Will the two witnesses please introduce themselves?” (Iris)

I stepped back and let the two people who walked in introduce themselves.

“... Hello. My name is Danban. I was the administrator at the chapel in this city.” (Danban)

While there are many small chapels for citizens to pray at, there is only one official chapel in the capital city. The one Danban was referring to is that singular official chapel, otherwise known as the Church Headquarters which lies in the northern part of the city. If someone mentioned that they went to the capital city’s chapel, this would be the first one that comes to mind.

“I was the pope’s hands and feet and worked as such for 20 years... Oh, yes. The sale of the chapel in Armelia was in my name. I was ordered to do this by the pope and then, for some strange reason, after 20 years of service, I was expelled from the chapel.” (Danban)

“Hello, your Majesty. I am Lenin. I worked in the same chapel with Danban. My role was to inform the Armelia territory of the sale of their chapel. I swear I did only what the Church asked of me, but... I was banished from the Church only a few days ago. I only did as they instructed, but, somehow, I was charged with the crime of falsehood. I still have a copy of the instructions and letter I sent to the Armelia fief. If there are doubts about my identity, you can ask others here to vouch for me, as I am very familiar with many of these faces.” (Lenin)

After the testimonies of these two witnesses, the audience grew noisy. I felt that we now had the upper hand.

“I am sure many of the priests present in this room can vouch for their identities; some, I am sure, are even friends with them.” (Iris)

Rather than asking the priests a question, I reaffirmed the facts.

Many priests had eyes wide with surprise at the sight of the two

witnesses, and immediately began to evade my gaze.

“I have presented evidence and witness testimonies. With this, I have fully presented my case, your Majesty. What is the verdict?” (Iris)

Lady Ellia bit her lips at my question. She was trying hard to find some way to refute my claims, but, unless she can provide the same quality of evidence, anything she might say from here on out will only serve to weaken her argument.

The pope's, Wilmotz's, face was beet red with fury, but there was nothing he could say either.

“Well, I think this marks the end of this inquiry meeting. We have all reached a unanimous conclusion... Is that not right?” (Queen Dowager)

The Queen Dowager spoke for the first time of this meeting. Like myself, no one could speak against or refute the claims of the Queen Dowager. Her question was less a directed question and more a rhetorical one confirming that the inquiry meeting would come to a close.

“Iris Lana Armelia, the royal family of this kingdom hereby declares you absolved of all crime in this matter and you are indeed a noble worthy of the name Armelia, one of the leading families of aristocrats in our country.” (Queen Dowager)

This proclamation signified the conclusion of the proceedings.

“Thank you. Thank you very much for your words, Queen Dowager. However, I have one request: Would it be alright to proceed with this inquiry meeting?” (Iris)

“Oh my... Is there still something to be addressed?” (Queen Dowager)

“Yes. It is about who will take responsibility for conducting such a despicable act.” (Iris)

Lady Ellia knitted her eyebrows together in a frown.

“The decision has already been made. There is no need to continue to pursue this matter. Isn't it pointless to continue this meeting any longer?” (Ellia)



“There is reason to pursue the matter further: we must find the true culprit who caused such an uproar and unrest for the citizens of this kingdom.” (Iris)

As I finished my sentence, I raised my head to look directly at the pope.

“Members of the house of Armelia have served as the prime ministers of this country for generations. We have been loyal and influential in our positions. I am proud of our house and its role. For someone to sow suspicion and distrust in our house... We must determine who has dared to do such a thing.” (Iris)

Several people glanced away. This was what I meant earlier when I said that everything would come around full swing.

“Your Majesty. To leave such an incident unresolved in this way will encourage and open the window for other countries to belittle us and citizens who have been negatively affected by this heinous act will not have the justice they deserve; it will sully the face of the nobility. It is our duty to find the culprit and bring them to justice.” (Iris)

Isn't that right, Pope Wilmotz? I did not say it aloud, but it was implied when I stared directly at him.

“It is as you say. What is your opinion on this matter, Ellia?” (Queen Dowager)

The Queen Dowager prompted Lady Ellia for her opinion but her mouth remained shut.

“Sigh. What do the priests of the Church think of this matter?” (Queen Dowager)

The queen let out a small sigh at Lady Ellia's lack of response and locked her gaze on the priests of the Church.

Many opened their mouths to speak but promptly closed them in the end.

The Queen began to rub her temples as she gazed coldly at the priests.

“I do not know why so many of you choose to remain silent. Unlike Iris,

none of you have presented me with any evidence to support your side and claims of innocence. Two priests were exiled from the Church, a noble was excommunicated, and now our country is in a state of turmoil. But all I have seen from your side were attempts to purge witnesses, destroy evidence, and frame a long-standing ally of this kingdom. Now, who will take proper responsibility and present their arguments?" (Queen Dowager)

"... Apologies, your Majesty." (Ralph)

Priest Ralph stood up to speak on behalf of the Church. Everyone turned their attention to him.

"Your Majesty. With regards to this case, we, the Church, will conduct a full investigation and will take upon ourselves responsibility for this incident. This was entirely our fault." (Ralph)

"Of course, a detailed investigation is a given. However, given that the Church is surrounded in a veil that masks its workings even to the nobility, how do we know that the Church will not simply repeat its mistake and push the blame onto these two individuals? Will you properly investigate the truth?" (Queen Dowager)

The chilling glare from the Queen sucked the air out of the room and pierced the hearts of the priests present. She is even better than Father at intimidating people.

This veil of mystery is more than just a metaphor. The Church has rooted itself deep within the center of the kingdom. No matter how powerful a noble is, they are not allowed to enter the Church's headquarters. The religion is also deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of the people. Thus, if they wanted to instigate a revolt or even a coup, they have the ability to do so.

... I won't let you escape this time. I will pry open the chink in your armor. I have to separate the second prince's faction and the Church today, otherwise something like this is bound to happen again. In particular, I need to take down the pope and separate the connection between Van and Edward.

“Of course, your Majesty. I will not let history repeat itself. I may be a priest, but I am also a citizen of this kingdom of Tusmeria. Even if the person who is responsible sits in the highest seat of the Church, they will be brought to justice.” (Ralph)

“Oh. How reliable... Even if they find that the culprit is yourself?”  
(Queen Dowager)

“Of course. We will hand over all documents related to this incident and have all priests and members questions by the investigators of the royal family. We will receive the punishment decided upon by the royal family themselves as dutiful citizens of this kingdom.” (Ralph)

“... Priest Ralph, it is not your place to make that decision...!” (Pope)

Upon hearing Priest Ralph’s declaration, the pope began to object.

But his objection was quickly interrupted by Priest Ralph’s icy glare.

“Yes, I am aware of my position, but this is the only thing we can do, your Holiness. The debt must be repaid and we must give the accounting documents to the daughter of the Duke of Armelia. I am sure you are aware of that, your Holiness.” (Ralph)

“...” (Pope)

“Please look into the eyes of the people standing before us. As of now, our innocence is held in doubt and the trust they have placed in us has been broken. The only way to regain said trust is by allowing the other side to properly investigate this matter and for us to receive our due punishment.” (Ralph)

“... It is as he says. I applaud you, Priest Ralph, for your courage and resolve. Because of your sincerity, I would like you to lead the investigation team of individuals of my choosing and to find out the truth behind this incident.” (Queen Dowager)

“I will devote myself to accomplish this task with every fiber of my being.” (Ralph)

The priest lowered his head to receive the duty in response... As

expected of an actor and actress with acting skills on par with god.

“No! Your Majesty! Something like that cannot be handled by him!”  
(Pope)

It was Pope Wilmotz who objected to the Queen’s decision.

“Why are you shouting?” (Queen Dowager)

The Queen asked him as she pierced him with her gaze.

“Apologies, your Majesty. But please rethink this decision! Please allow me compile a proper team to investigate this incident, and I will make sure they report to you directly every day. I will even lead this team to ensure that there is no corruption.” (Pope)

“No, Pope Wilmotz. It is as Priest Ralph said. No one here trusts in the Church’s personnel anymore. I am asking Priest Ralph, as he is even prepared to face justice head on if he were named the culprit. I respect his resolve in the face of such a possibility.” (Queen Dowager)

“That is...” (Pope)

“There will be no further objections. Priest Ralph, I look forward to your work.” (Queen Dowager)

“It will be my honor.” (Ralph)

# Chapter 67: Pursuit

“Priest Ralph. If you are in charge of the investigations, then I have no worries. However, I would like you to investigate one more thing.” (Iris)

“What would that be?” (Ralph)

“The flow of funds.” (Iris)

“If by that you mean what the capital gained from the sale of the chapel in the Armelia fief was later used for, I had already planned to investigate it. “

“There is that, but there is another aspect of that money I am worried about.” (Iris)

“What do you mean?” (Ralph)

“The funds obtained from that sale was great in amount, and, in addition to that, the Church receives donations from many nobles throughout the kingdom. Given the amount of money the Church should have, I was surprised to hear that the Church was begging my mother to attend their events in order to gain more donations. That degree of desperation implies a lack of funds or perhaps something more insidious, don’t you agree?” (Iris)

“That is...” (Ralph)

“If you are planning to fully investigate this case and properly regain the peoples’ trust, then please consider adopting a policy of complete transparency. As a member of the Armelia house, I am not opposed to donating to the Church. My mother will naturally assist with that now that my innocence has been proven. However, if the Church continues to conceal facts and crucial information even after the events of this case, then history is bound to repeat itself in another fief, country, or otherwise. How could continued secrecy be considered atonement for what has happened? (Iris)

“I understand your concerns, Madame Iris.” (Ralph)

Priest Ralph seemed surprised by my proposition. I wonder if he thought

I would not bring such a thing up or if perhaps this was not discussed in the “meeting” he had with a certain individual. Either way, it is of no consequence to me, as I have no intention of holding back my opinion.

“I have learned many things while operating the Azura Conglomerate. To be specific, I saw something regarding the flow of funds among my conglomerate’s records. Mr. Wilmotz, how much is your annual income?” (Iris)

“To ask such a thing from a servant of God... How unbecoming of a noble...!” (Pope)

“I would rather not ask such a thing, either. However, since this question is relevant to the case, I am asking about it. The records we have at the Azura Conglomerate show the number of goods that you purchase from my company is equivalent to that of a highly-ranked noble. Is the Pope’s salary that high? Priest Ralph, should such a thing be possible?” (Iris)

“No. There should be no such thing.” (Ralph)

“Well... Then, Pope Wilmotz, where have you obtained the required funds from?” (Iris)

“!! W-what impudence! To suggest that I have stolen from the people...! I have done nothing of the sort!” (Pope)

I never explicitly said he was taking money from the people. However, it was becoming apparent to other nobles based on his words and reactions.

“I cannot prove that you have embezzled money from the current available evidence, which is why I am requesting that Priest Ralph include this in his investigation. Priest Ralph, could you please conduct a thorough investigation of this matter as well?” (Iris)

“I will do so with all my power.” (Ralph)

“Are there any other inquiries you would like to make, Iris Lana Armelia?” (Queen Dowager)

“No. That would be all, your Majesty.” (Iris)

I bowed to the queen and withdrew.

“Well then. We will now closely monitor all priests of the Church. The Cardinals and Pope Wilmotz will hereby be under house arrest until the investigation is concluded.” (Queen Dowager)

“...” (Pope)

The Pope looked like he wanted to say something, but, in the end, did not utter a word. I had accounted for the possibility of him presenting evidence that may overturn the ruling, and thus prepared another trump card. However, it seems I did not need to use it. I was filled with anxiety, as I did not expect this to end so smoothly. It feels as though this went too well...

Either way, I succeeded in making Pope Wilmotz and the Church the target of investigation; I met all of my objectives.

Thus, the inquiry met its conclusion.

# Chapter 68: Backstage

“Please do not surprise me like that again. You truly had me worried for a moment there.” (Ralph)

“Oh my. Did you think I was that unreliable?” (Iris)

One week had passed since the meeting. This past week, many priests and Church officials were purged from the Church. They were not excommunicated as I had been, but being purged from the Church as a priest is a punishment that rivals excommunication. The investigation of the Church’s funds was also underway. When the culprit is found, the Kingdom will deliver punishment under the federal law.

“That was not what I meant; it was because you said such a thing that I was surprised. I guess even a cornered cat will attack a lion.” (Ralph)

“Please, you jest. If I had said that anywhere else, it would not have had any effect. The allegation I brought to the attention of the nobility will surely instill hesitation to donate or even a desire cut off contact with the Pope, which would make it more difficult for him to erase any evidence.” (Iris)

The connections that the Pope had built collapsed when I brought up the allegations of embezzlement, since contacting the Pope would place you under suspicion of being complicit in his schemes. No one will come to his defense or aid during this period.

“But, even so, if someone does try to contact him, it will make your job easier. As you have seen, many people did try and you caught them all with ease.” (Iris)

“Yes. It is as you have said.” (Ralph)

Priest Ralph heaved a sigh.

“Well then. Were you satisfied with the results of my inquiry?” (Iris)

“Yes. Thank you. We are now able to pursue the Pope while dealing with the corruption that has taken root within the Church.” (Ralph)



During the trial, Priest Ralph and I had been accomplices. Although we pretended to be in different camps, we had already agreed upon the actions we would take during that meeting. The only reason I was able to gain his cooperation was due to Dean's assistance.

I had to find a person who had influence and power within the Church but was also in the faction opposed to the Pope. Priest Ralph was such an individual, but, since I had been excommunicated, it made it difficult to contact him.

It was thanks to Dean that I was able to gain Priest Ralph, who leads the faction opposed to the Pope, as an ally. Dean is truly a talented person who I want on my side.

"Will you now form the Church into your ideal?" (Iris)

Priest Ralph... Even though he is someone who sits among the higher echelons of the Church, he was still unable to become a cardinal or anyone with an influential title. I heard it had been because some people in his faction defected to the Pope's side.

"Yes. It is shameful how pervasive the corruption throughout the Church is. We were on the verge of losing everything we originally stood for. Priests are not supposed to mimic nobility. They had, for the sake of pleasure and greed, embezzled funds from the Church. Sooner or later, people would have revolted against the Church and reduced the organization to rubble. The Church has been the recipient of many donations of late, and the people in charge sapped those funds, leaving our organization with nearly nothing. However, now, with this purge, we can become a proper Church that serves the people." (Ralph)

The Church is a place meant for prayer and was supposed to be an oasis where the poor could receive medical treatment, be fed, and where orphans could be taken care of. All of these services were supposed to be funded by donations.

So, even though the Baron's daughter, Yuri Noire, had been donating to help with said activities, all that money, in reality, was being funneled back to the higher-ups of the Church. Furthermore, the donation and

charity parties were being held to fund Church higher-ups as well.

However, as more of the Kingdom's budget was being allocated to fund the Church, the Church officials' desire and greed grew.

The Church, in its current state, just provides relief and solace to those giving donations or who have the power to contribute funds.

"I expect great things of you, Priest Ralph." (Iris)

"I will do my best to meet your expectations." (Ralph)

Priest Ralph smiled.

"Was... I able to meet your expectations?" (Iris)

Priest Ralph made a huge gamble by placing his trust in me and providing me with the Church account book.

Although I do not have it with me now and will dispose of it later, there is still evidence of our cooperation via the letter he sent to me with his seal on it.

This was proof of the trust and expectations he had for me and his way of solidifying our alliance and roles as accomplices. He put himself and his career in danger by placing his trust in me.

"You have exceeded my expectations. It is now my turn to exceed yours." (Ralph)

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart. In the future, should you run into any trouble, the Duke of Armelia will spare no expense to assist you. Conversely, I hope you will extend your hand in the future as well." (Iris)

I said what my father wanted me to tell him.

"Will you be leaving now?" (Ralph)

"Yes. My company just released a new product, so we are quite busy at the moment." (Iris)

I received a formal apology from the Church and they withdrew my excommunication.

This seemed like an excellent time to put our new products on the

market: dandelion coffee was one of them. Merida experimented with various things and made it for me. We also put out new varieties of sweets and a few other products as well.

All of the new products were a huge hit, thanks to my mother. Now, our sales have reached new heights. We also introduced another delicious sweet made with chocolate.

All the things I just mentioned were developed and produced exclusively in our fief. Therefore, all the employees that Edward filched from my company were unable to replicate these new products.

To sum it up: All of the customers have returned to my side, and all the employees who joined Edward's company also want to return... There is no way I'd let that happen, though.

It is not just the employees that want to return; our previous trading partners and major buyers are all coming back. I predict that his company will soon go bankrupt... What poor management. Why did I even like him in the first place?

"Then, Priest Ralph, I will take my leave. I bid you good day." (Iris)

# Chapter 69: Backstage From Another View (1)

Editor's Notes: I made a few stylistic alterations for grammar, flow, clarity, and, of course, flair. I also changed the name from "Ludy" to "Rudy" since Rudy is an actual western name (Rudiger etc). If you guys prefer Ludy, holler. Enjoy a satisfying treat.

Footsteps echoed throughout the building

"What a magnificent prison." (Rudy)

Rudy made a sarcastic comment and laughed.

"Well, since the Pope is being imprisoned here, it cannot be the same as where normal citizens would be held." (Alfred)

"Your Highness... That mode of thinking is what created this sort of situation in the first place." (Rudy)

I indicated to the guards at the entrance to let me pass. The Pope, under the pretext of being under house arrest, is living in this special prison.

"Who – who are –!! Ah! You are..." (Pope)

"The Pope's face twisted in shock as he stared at me. It was so amusing that I couldn't help but feel the corners of my lips raise.

"It has been too long, Pope Wilmotz Lutasha... Ah, I should correct that: former Pope Wilmotz Lutasha."

I have to admit that I smirked when I said that. However, since I am happy to have finally excised one of the parasites clinging to this country, it should be permitted.

"... You–You're the first prince, Alfred! Why are you here?!" (Pope)

"Why, you ask? Strange... I thought all of those machinations and foolish ploys were to get my attention. I was rather flattered by the gesture, so I wanted to respond to your call." (Alfred)

Wilmotz gulped as he tried to restrain his panic.

“Lady Ellia and Marquis Maeria both cooperated with you and the matter was really getting out of hand, so I could no longer remain in the shadows. Their forces and mine are two competing powers in this kingdom. Although they have a slight advantage, it is nothing that cannot be dealt with easily. However, as soon as you joined their alliance, I could not continue to sit idly by and waited in anticipation for their next move, which, as it turns out, was to diminish the power of the Armelia house. Thanks to their idiotic plans of attempting to wage war on one of the most influential people in this kingdom, I did not have to step out onto the stage myself; the Armelia house’s daughter foiled their plan with ease. It was a result that truly surpassed my expectations.” (Alfred)

“P...please... Your Highness... I was only being used by Lady Ellia... To say that I was a co-conspirator is wrong... Please... Have mercy... “ (Pope)

I burst out in laughter when I heard Wilmotz’s pitiful voice. I found it comical that the Pope would be asking for clemency from a mere mortal. What a pathetic old man.

“I am ‘an easy opponent’... Was that not what you said about me?” (Alfred)

“I-!! I have never said anything of the sort! It was all Lady Ellia...” (Pope)

“Wrong.” (Alfred)

My voice was cold. It seemed he was quite intimidated by it.

“Huh?” (Pope)

“That merchant... Oh, what was his name? Oh yes. Divian.” (Alfred)

The blood from Wilmotz’s face drained, making him a deathly pale... I am truly surprised that this thing was able to scrape by for so long in such a high position of responsibility. I understand that the church works differently in their power struggles than we do in the Royal Palace, but even so... Such a weak creature...

“... Why...?” (Pope)

“So you were being used by Lady Ellia and Marquis Maeria... That is

certainly plausible, but, were that the case, you would have stepped away after using your power to perform the necessary actions. Instead, you maintained your role, so I have to conclude that you had some other motive.” (Alfred)

“...” (Pope)

Wilmotz’s mouth opened and closed repeatedly like a fish out of water... His rebuttal does not seem to be coming.

“From the start, your aim was never to sully Iris... Well, it would not have required you to take such extreme measures if that were your sole purpose, so the purpose of all this has to be greater than just her. Your aim was to temporarily stop the Prime Minister, Louis, and have all political focus shift towards him. This would then allow Divian and that faction to move about more easily. By slowing down the supplies from the Armelia house and their influence, Divian would help spread your influence to other countries, and you were hoping to gain more power through those channels. Oh, you do not need to answer, by the way; your words have no influence.” (Alfred)

“If you have figured everything out already... why...?” (Pope)

“Why? Do you mean to ask why I am here? Why, it was simply to take advantage of the situation and to thank you for having self-destructed. Because of your actions, I was able to rid the country of many of our resident leeches.” (Alfred)

The Pope’s face distorted into another interesting expression.

“Well then. I have other business I must attend to. I hope you will find this room relaxing and comfortable.” (Alfred)

I turned and left the room with Rudy. Wilmotz crawled after me while shouting something unintelligible, which was quite annoying. I believe I left the room with perfect timing.

“You have worked very hard, your Highness.” (Rudy)

Rudy grinned at me.

“It was simply the perfect occasion to clean out corruption that was shielded by the faith. I could not waste such an opportunity.” (Alfred)

“No. I meant helping Iris.” (Rudy)

... Damnit. He really liked bringing this point up.

“Well, I did have her take the brunt of the hardships, so I have an obligation to help her in return.” (Alfred)

“No, you did not have any real reason to do so. In fact, it would have been the perfect opportunity for you to reduce the Armelia household’s power, but, in the end, you still aided her; in fact, you helped her gain even more influence.” (Rudy)

“... Do you have a problem with my methods?” (Alfred)

“No, no! Haha... I believe now you can consider the Armelia household and all of the other neutral factions associated with them to be on your side.” (Rudy)

Indeed. I have heard from the reports that many of the previously neutral factions have been trying to get in touch with me.

“Obviously, my reason for saying that was to thank you for lending a hand to my cousin. I really do appreciate what you did, your Highness.” (Rudy)

“... I did not do it for your sake.” (Alfred)

# Chapter 70: Backstage From Another View

## (2)

TLnote: Ludius Jib Anderson is Iris's cousin on her mother's side. So he is Gazelle's grandson and future head of the Anderson family, Gazelle's family.

"You seem to favor my cousin quite a bit, don't you?" (Ludy)

While laughing and giving me a big grin, he asked ... You sure find this amusing don't you, Ludy?

"You have really big ears." (Alfred)

"What? We are relatives. I do not need to investigate anything concerning her. I just have to send a letter, unlike you. Even though you only wanted a short-term contact, you visited her many times and greatly deepened the relationship between the two of you." (Ludy)

He still keeps laughing and giving me that grin ... Yep, he is enjoying this.

"I was really surprised. I heard you go to the orphanage with her many times and play with the children there. I do not believe I have ever seen you play with children other than Letisha. You have also spent more time with her in the office and even went out together to see the city while wearing masks. When I heard this from the people over there, I thought 'is that the same person who is with me?'" (Ludy)

I try to trip him using my feet while we are walking and seeing him stumble brings a smile to my face. I understand what I did there was childish.

"... I do agree with you. I did only intend to see her only once." (Alfred)

It began with just an interest in the rapidly growing fief of Armelia. I was very worried that the daughter was going to take command of the fief. I had seen her in school once, but my impression of her during that time was terrible. She had very bluntly insulted the Baron's daughter Yuri



Noire. Even though I understood why she had done it, there were other ways of handling the situation. Thus, even though I find my little brother quite foolish, I understood his decision to annul the marriage at the time. When I heard she had taken charge of the most important fief in the kingdom I was quite worried. Rather more importantly, what was her father thinking?

Even though I saw reports of the fief expanding and improving greatly, I thought it was because of someone brilliant taking charge and leading things instead of her. Thus, I infiltrated the residence to find the person and wanted to pull them to my side ... To my surprise that person was her. I had received such a shock at that time, I felt my jaw almost dislocate.

“I have to say that it was funny. I never felt a burden or anything else when I accomplished something other people said to be amazing. I have also never been impressed by anything either. I could never find anything amusing ... but when I am with her, I never feel bored. Her ideas are things I have never considered. The proposals she makes are things that shatter my existing thoughts ... Every time I am with her, she brings about a new discovery. The days I am with her are days I never feel tired or bored. Truly never a dull day with her.”(Alfred)

When I started to notice her, I felt I wanted to spoil her. Even though I think weakness is not something that should be shown to others ... She believes that having weakness itself is wrong. She became hurt by this, and just thinking that she felt hurt made me feel pain and want to help her again. These traits of hers are what make her lovely in my eyes.

“People, goods, politics ... All of these things are work I have done at a desk. All the numbers that I see from the reports are just numbers to me, they mean nothing else. The human resources are just pieces on a board. You just should think of how to skillfully use them. However, after going to that land ... I started to think differently.”(Alfred)

“... Yes, I also think that you have become softer than before.”(Ludy)

“You sure say it straight.”(Alfred)

“... That is also why I am concerned.”(Ludy)

His tone suddenly changes and his facial expression also becomes very serious.

“I believe the fact that you have become soft is a good thing for you. But I also believe that if you continue to become any softer, you will lose sight of your plans ... I am just worrying about you regretting any decisions you may make in the future.”(Ludy)

“... What you say now and what you said before are contradicting themselves. I did not think you would say this right after you had thanked me for helping your cousin Iris out, Ludius Jib Anderson. “(Alfred)

“That is another matter entirely, I also believe that a person of her caliber would not be crushed by something like this. I am just informing you of my thinking as your aide, Alfred Dean Tasmeria.”(Ludy)

# Chapter 71: Backstage From Another View

## (3)

“Understood.”(Dean)

I’m grateful for his concern. His words are irreplaceable.

“Do not worry. Everything that will happen from now on will go as I had planned. I’ve decided on this since the time the King and Lady Ellia began to shun us: I will never become like my father.” (Dean)

“I am rather relieved to hear that.”(Ludy)

Ludy breathed a sigh of relief.

“To begin with, you had no reason to worry. My determination becomes stronger when I see her.”(Dean)

“Why?”(Ludy)

“An incompetent king will cause his people to die. Because my father was blinded by his love for my mother, he was unable to save her from insidious plots and became an empty shell when he lost her. I feel only pity for my father.”(Dean)

That man became unable to move or think. He lost all will to live after Mother died, allowing Lady Ellia and her household of the Marquis Maeria to slowly gain control of the kingdom.

What was more foolish was that he married the woman who killed his beloved, my mother. He overlooked her crime and simply did as she bid him. In the end, he exiled me and Leticia from the palace. To him, my sister and I were just children living in the palace, unrelated to him.

If my grandmother did not take us in, then Lady Ellia would have already killed the both of us.

“The sight of her strong figure carrying the burden of the world on her shoulders but continuing to grow stronger has inspired me. That man who suffers from illness will eventually abdicate the throne. It is at that moment that I will use him to eliminate all of the parasites living off of

this kingdom.”(Dean)

I will send them to hell together. Ever since that time, I no longer feel any sort of family bond with him. For me, my little sister, Leti, is my family. That is why I have no qualms about using my own father, the King.

Oh... I see... I understand what Ludy was talking about... How I have grown soft... I finally realized during our conversation that I... was a cold person before.

I responded to nothing. I was never amused by or interested in anything. No matter how many people die in this country from either war or starvation, they were only just numbers to me. I felt I would always be this way. The only ones I would care about were Leti, Ludy, and Grandmother. I can understand why both have commented that I’ve grown soft.

In addition, I also realized how important she has become to me.

I began to laugh.

“I will not become like my father. My determination will never waver, because the person who I hold dear is someone who can never belong to me.”(Dean)

“If your Highness wishes, the House of Armelia would be happy to arrange for her marriage. I think my aunt is pushing for this to happen. At some point, she will have to give up her position as lord to her brother.”(Ludy)

It is as Ludy says. The Armelia household has Berne, who is meant to inherit the lord title... But I can imagine her response.

“What of it?”(Iris)

She would be unconcerned, as she also has the Azura Conglomerate and has established some aspects of democracy in the governing of the fief. As a result, whoever takes over would not matter to her. She will probably find something new to work hard on.

“I love her, but she is someone who should be free to spread her wings throughout the world. I do not believe a cage like the royal palace would

suit her.”(Dean)

That is the person I hold dear to my heart. The image of her standing tall, toiling, overcoming all obstacles in her way... Her eyes radiant and clear as the cloudless sky. The royal palace, with all its discipline and tedium, would make her lose that which makes her special.

“I will apologize to my grandmother later, but I have no intentions of taking her into the royal palace.”(Dean)

“... Is that so...?” (Ludy)

# Chapter 72: Report x Secret Maneuver (1)

As we were talking, we made our way to my study. Whenever I am at the Dowager's palace, I spend all my waking hours in this room. Though, recently, I have been going to the Royal Palace and outside the city to do work and to see her.

The walls are lined with shelves teeming with books, making my study itself rather narrow. I had always been under the impression that this room houses the most books in the Kingdom until I visited the Armelia fief. When I saw that room, I felt that my study does not actually have that many books.

I sat down at my desk, which was located at the end of the room.

The desk and chair were things left by the previous king. When I first saw them, I thought they were not very grand, but I have grown to like them.

"Shall I prepare some tea?" (Ludy)

I nodded and closed my eyes for a moment.

I heard the door close as Ludy called a servant outside the room.

This castle actually has few servants. My grandmother said she does not need servants in her retirements, but, in reality, she did this to reduce the number of potential assassins who may be hired to kill me and Leticia.

"Here is your tea, your Highness." (Ludy)

Ludy also serves as my butler. He is a very talented individual who is capable of most anything. He also makes an excellent cup of tea.

"Oh... This is..." (Dean)

"This is the herbal tea made by the Azura conglomerate. I hear it is good for fatigue." (Ludy) "I know. Thank you for your thoughtfulness." (Dean)

"Think nothing of it, your Highness." (Ludy)

The golden hue and unique scent were rather peculiar, but the tea itself was delicious.

“The conglomerate seems to be recovering smoothly.” (Dean) “Yes. She is very capable. After her innocence was confirmed and the news disseminated throughout the kingdom, she began to release new products in rapid succession. She is great at seizing opportunity.” (Ludy) “I hear my little brother is in a bind over it.” (Dean) I chuckled.

Although his actions are done for petty reasons, it was well-timed. He poached the employees that were a part of the production process instead of attempting to buy the store itself.

However, he only gets 60 points for his plan.

If you are going to try and recruit people from that company, you should not recruit kitchen staff. What makes a company unique is the innovative products and management methods it employs. The people he should have tried to recruit were the development staff and those in charge of finance... at least, that is what I would have done.

“The first report from the Church has arrived: The pope has been removed from his position and assets. All false charges made against the Armelia household’s daughter have been retracted. The pope has also been charged with falsifying evidence and is now being confined. Also, two other cardinals and three priests have been exiled from the Church.” (Ludy) Two of seven cardinals were deeply involved in this incident. What a pity. The Marquis Maeria has moved quickly to secure the Church’s cooperation.

The Church will be out of the picture for a while, as they will be taking this time to rebuild and restructure.

“Where is Milo?” (Dean)

“I have not seen him today. I do not believe he has returned yet.” (Ludy) “Hmm...” (Dean)

“Tada! Elegantly appearing from thin air: The inconspicuous Milo~!” (Milo) The man who abruptly appeared in the middle of my conversation with Ludy was Milo. His face surrounded delineated by soft brown hair was strangely adora— feminine.

“As usual, you arrive without notifying anyone.” (Ludy) The name of the individual who looked like a woman and appeared out of nowhere is my shadow. He acts as my spy and is excellent at gathering intelligence.

“Well, of course! I am a shadow, after all. So, what is it?” (Milo) “That is what I should be saying to you. Report on the information you have gathered.” (Ludy)



## Chapter 73: Report x Secret Maneuver (2)

“The report... All I can say is, that girl is scary. I’m seriously shaking in my boots here.” (Milo) I sighed at Milo’s words and thought little of them.

“What makes you think that?” (Dean)

“Well, you know that the son of the Pope hasn’t been charged with anything yet, right? He’s still in the line of succession to become the next Pope.” (Milo) “That may change in light of this incident. Those in line to become the Pope are required to enter the academy, study the world, and gain allies among the nobles and royalty of this country. After graduation, they enter the Church and train diligently to become the future Pope. But, now, since the head of the house has been forcibly removed from his position in the midst of the successor’s training, there has been some concern over the possibility that leaving the position vacant for too long may be detrimental to this country and the Church. In response, they have been pushing for a new person to take the over the Pope’s position and that the individual should be from a different house, given the degree of shame the current one has amassed.” (Ludy) Milo nodded his head at the information Ludy presented.

In essence, Ludy was saying that the possibility of Van becoming the next Pope was very low.

“Exactly. Exactly. So, when that son went to her like he usually does, she responded with, ‘Do you need something?’ as if she didn’t even know him. I know she has been going in and out of many fiefs, but I never thought she would abandon the Pope’s family as soon as they became useless.” (Milo) Although he said it with a smile, I felt faint hostility in his voice.

“Even though it is too early to know whether or not he’ll become the pope, she cut him off as soon as she felt he was useless. Well, I guess this is the appropriate attitude to have if you are aiming for the top...” (Milo) “What’s that now? Do not tell me you have fallen for that Baron’s daughter.” (Dean) “Come on. She isn’t that appealing. Also, I already have a master. I’m not the type of guy to cheat on others.” (Milo) “So, are you

done with your report, or is there something else you'd like to add?"

(Dean) When I posed this question, Milo's expression suddenly turned stern.

"They have surrounded that girl with rats. What do you want me to do?"

(Milo) "Are they guards? Or...?" (Ludy)

"I think they may be both; some for defending her and others who are acting suspiciously..." (Milo) "Have the people around her changed or said anything of note?" (Dean)

"No. None of her entourage have said anything of concern. They also have yet to notice her tendency of abandoning things she deems useless. Though, the Duke's and knight captain's sons have both started to distance themselves from her." (Milo) "Hmm... Even Dorsen?" (Dean)

"Yeah. It is a good thing. I mean, if he continued to remain by her side like that, we would have had to eliminate him too." (Milo) "Well, getting rid of one knight would not necessarily impact the country, so there would be no problems whether or not he stays or leaves." (Ludy) Ludy's words were pointed. As expected of a person with a military general for his grandfather. He thinks along those lines, huh? An opinion based solely on merit and results.

"Ludy, you're pretty scary too." (Milo)

"Really. I would think it to be the natural conclusion." (Ludy)

At his retort, Milo simply smiled as he normally did.

"Oh. Also, that maid from the daughter of the Duke is snooping around as usual." (Milo) "You mean, Tanya?" (Dean)

"Yes. I think that person is an excellent spy. I would like for her to work with us if possible." (Milo) If Milo says it, that means her ability is real. I would also like for her to join our cause...

"It would be impossible for her to leave Iris and join us instead. I think it would require moving heaven and earth in order for her to ever leave Iris." (Ludy) Regrettably, I have to agree with that.

“If I had met her before you, I would probably also be helping Iris.”  
(Milo) “The only reason you were ever able to see Tanya was because her master is Iris. She would have otherwise never stepped into your line of work.” (Ludy) “True. How sad. Truly sad.” (Milo)

“So, is there anything else I should know concerning the Baron girl’s actions?” (Dean) “She has met with the merchant named Divian about two or three times a month. The contents of their meetings were nothing worth noting; they were usually something to the effect of, “How is life?” or “How are things going with the Prince?”. They were basically trivial conversations concerning daily life.” (Milo) “Her relationship with the Prince is definitely an important concern for them. If Divian keeps asking these questions, then it’s likely they want to use the daughter to capture the second prince and make him do their bidding.” (Ludy) “Well, I am pretty sure they are wary of you, Master... Or, maybe, they’re treating her as a pawn they can discard as it becomes convenient?” (Milo) Milo tried to respond to Ludy’s thoughts. Ludy, however, did not seem convinced and knit his eyebrows.

“A piece they can discard... Well, I am fairly certain that is the case. Also, they have gotten a taste of how they can control the course of events over the past few months.” (Dean) “A taste, huh?” (Ludy)

“Also, even if my little brother were to ascend to the throne as they planned, they will still have one major enemy to deal with: Louis Lana Armelia, the prime minister of this kingdom. He has a solid foundation in politics, a wealthy fief, and holds power equal to that of the King. Thus, even if they do happen to use my stupid brother, they will be unable to do anything flashy, else they get sniffed out and hanged by him. It is better to use nobles and rob the kingdom of its strength before striking.” (Dean) “Hmm... I guess they do not wish to rule, but instead aim to gain territory in this country... But why?” (Milo) “This kingdom’s fertile land is highly desirable. We have received reports from Irene that their harvests have been poor in recent years.” (Ludy) Irene is a shadow like Milo. She is currently with Baron Mabaras Messi at the country border and acts as a liaison between me and him. She is also a spy for us in the country of

Towair.

She has said that Towair has been in poor condition, and, apparently, this year has been especially bad. The country experiences a near-perpetual winter, making the land dry and infertile. Also, since they lost the war against us, they had many resources taken from them. Basically, they are desperate enough to strike at a much more powerful country, such as ours.

For them to be so impatient must mean that they think us vulnerable enough to succumb to their efforts.

“Well, please don’t worry. I will investigate more; it is my job... But I think I will rest a bit first.” (Milo) “Is your report finished?” (Ludy)

“Yes. I do have a few other minor things that I will bring to your attention later.” (Milo) “I understand. I will be counting on you in the future.” (Dean)

“Understood.” (Milo)

He answered with a serious face and left in the same fashion in which he came: without a sound.

# Chapter 74: Little Sister's Strategy (1)

"My body feels a bit stiff, so I am going to go and exercise for a bit."  
(Dean) "... Are you planning on sneaking into the military's training session again?" (Ludy) "Yes. General Gazelle has returned, and, since he is the one instructing it, it would be a waste not to attend." (Dean) General Gazelle took care of me since I was a child. He used to train me all the time in this castle. A knight order exists as well, but I feel that the military is more diligent. Also, since they maintain public security throughout the city, they also train in street-fighting.

"Brother, it is fine to move your body, but please use your head and hands first." (Leticia) She sighed as she entered the room. My little sister's name is Leticia, but I prefer to call her Letty. She has soft, emerald-green eyes and blonde hair, like me. She is the third princess and third in line for succession. Everything about her appearance reminds me of our mother. My sister has truly grown into a beautiful lady.

"Letty, have you finished already? As expected, you work quickly."  
(Dean) "Yes, brother. Please, control yourself." (Leticia)

Her smile, while seemingly cute, was laced with immense hostility. She placed a stack of documents on my desk.

"Here is the favor you asked me to take care of. There is a place that has a bit of a problem with their finances, so please check it." (Leticia) While I am away, Leticia deals with all of the documents and compiles reports. Since the King fell ill, my work increased exponentially. I would be unable to leave my desk were it not for her help.

She has been trapped here since she was quite young. My position at the time was weak, and I could do little to help her situation. She said she did not want to participate in the power struggle for the throne and put all her energy towards her studies.

Her ability and skill at doing paperwork was praised even by the Prime Minister.

"You have improved greatly. If it is the current you, I will be able to

‘leave’ more frequently in the future.” (Dean) “Brother, before you plan your next outing, please, look over these documents. Rather, please do not go out for a while.” (Leticia) I quickly leafed through the reports and documents she compiled and reviewed and could not find a single mistake. On the contrary, she even took note of minor details and sent out people to investigate issues.

“The minister of human rights is in the second prince’s faction. Even if she wants to carry out a small project such as this one, it will definitely get rejected.” (Leticia) “Indeed.” (Ludy)

The country’s operations are split into seven administrative departments: finance, military affairs, legal affairs, foreign affairs, human rights, education, and infrastructure. The Prime Minister organizes all of them and reports their activities and matters to the King. The administration jobs also include negotiations with each lord to create policies that would benefit the country.

The power of incumbent lords of the land is significant. As such, it takes a long time to make compromises with them, especially while running the country. Because of this, I proposed a policy to further centralize this process. However, it lacked majority support, resulting in continued rejections.

The finance minister, Earl Sagittaria, the military affairs, and foreign affairs ministers are all on my side.

The human rights, education, and infrastructure ministers all side with the second prince.

One of the key ministers was replaced with someone from the Church, allowing them to force many decisions because of his support. However, since the purge, he was removed. The Church remains in chaos and is useless. I want to use this opportunity to separate Church and State.

Oh yes. I forgot to mention one more minister. The legal affairs minister is neutral like the Prime Minister once was. Since the excommunication incident, however, the Prime Minister now supports my faction.

“She had money hidden in her bosom...? sigh... To think this type of

person became the minister of human rights.” (Dean) “You have been too preoccupied with your political games.” (Leticia) In addition to embezzling the money for herself, the minister of human rights used it for bribery.

“By games, you mean the fight for the throne between me and my little brother? Well, it is indeed a game to win the throne, but I have never considered him an opponent.” (Dean) “What a strange thing to say... Oh. That reminds me...” (Leticia)

“What is it?” (Dean)

“Please, let me meet the Armelia Duke’s daughter.” (Leticia)

She made her request firmly and her eyes sparkled.

“... Why are you asking this so suddenly?” (Dean)

I should have just cut the conversation short or changed topics, but, since I asked, our discussion continued.

“We are birds of a feather: powerful women who are excellent at doing their work. I would like to exchange ideas and discuss various things with her... is what I would like to say. The real reason I want to meet her is because of how fond of her you are.” (Leticia) “We are not like that, you know.” (Dean)

“Really? That is disheartening. But, since you ignored an important chance to reduce the power of the Armelian Duke, it shows just how much you like her.” (Leticia) “That is—” (Dean)

“— Because she is a skilled person. Please, Brother.” (Leticia)

The strength of her determination and her straightforwardness made it impossible to argue.

“She cannot come inside this castle, so how would you meet her?” (Dean) “I believe that if I were to travel with you and Ludy, I would be safe.” (Leticia) “I do not think we will ever travel together to the Armelia fiefdom though.” (Dean) “What? Are you planning on leaving me here alone again? He is such a terrible brother. Isn’t he, Ludy?” (Leticia) “I...

cannot comment on this matter.” (Ludy)

Ludy smiled bitterly and tried to stay out of the discussion.

“Even Ludy has the same reaction.” (Leticia)

In response to Ludy’s words, she sharpened her tongue proportionally to her dissatisfaction. I saw her shoulders droop as she sighed, and the atmosphere quickly turned dark.

I thought I should quickly change topics, but, for some reason, I kept silent. She opened her mouth.

“Well... I do want to see Iris, but I also would like to go outside. I have been in this castle for too long and want to see what life is like outside the castle and connect with the people. I felt that the Armelia fief would be the perfect place to do so.” (Leticia) “Do you understand the position you are in? If so, knowing your position, you still wish to do that?” (Dean) Letty is not allowed to go to many places, and the places where she is allowed to go consists solely of this castle and a few rooms in the imperial palace. The reason for this is not because of her lineage or internal politics.

She looks too much like our mother. As of now, her appearance is similar to how our mother looked when she was young, but, in a few years’ time, she will be the spitting image of our mother. If the King were to see her, he would spring out of bed, embrace her, and treat her as a princess should be treated. I cannot allow him to see her, though; the more compassion he shows her, the more the noose around her neck will tighten.

Letty’s resemblance to our mother would make her Ellia’s main target.

To Ellia, we are obstacles. If she were to see Letty now, she would employ every tool available to eliminate her, and neither I nor the King can guard her for all hours of the day. Also, after seeing how far the King has fallen, how can I trust him with the life of my beloved little sister?

I know this is my ego talking.

But I do not want to lose another family member.



I do not want to experience that much grief again.

I may as well be like the King. I am keeping my little sister locked in this gilded cage because I am afraid to lose her.

“I understand Brother’s concerns. I am nothing but a burden... But... I still want to see the world. I want to breathe the same air and understand the experiences of our people. How will I ever accomplish anything if I cannot understand the world and attend balls and parties?” (Leticia) I stared deeply into Letty’s eyes... My little sister has grown up.

“I want to see the outside world. I don’t want to be like my older brother. I don’t want to live in a stronghold in comfort but shielded from the rest of the world for the rest of my life.” (Leticia) She will eventually have to leave this place...

That is why she is trying to negotiate now.

“I understand.” (Dean)

“... Huh?” (Leticia)

“We will go to the fief soon, but you have to be escorted by either me or Ludy, OK?” (Dean) “Thank you so much!!” (Leticia)

Letty smiled and hugged me.

“Now then, let us finish dealing with all of these documents so you can leave early without the looming threat of being crushed by work afterwards. Please, do your share as well, Brother.” (Leticia) “Yes. I understand.” (Dean)

She was in a good mood. She took a stack of documents I dealt with earlier with the intention of checking them.

“Princess Letty, I will carry those.” (Ludy)

Ludy left the room to chase after her.

# Chapter 75: Little Sister's Strategy (2)

\*Ludy's POV

"..... You've really done it, Princess Letty." (Ludy)

"..... My, Ludy, what might you be talking about?" (Leticia)

Princess Letty, Prince Alfred's little sister, gave a cheerful grin as she asked me in return.

Even though you so transparently know... Whilst thinking about it, I loosened a response from my lips.

"Don't tell me... that conversation from before... Right from the start, your aim was the travel permit, correct?"(Ludy)

"Fufufu, you guessed right~."(Leticia)

While it wasn't a lie that she also wanted to meet with Iris, she knew that it could only be if fortune brings them together... What she was really after was the travel permit... and she splendidly acquired it, just as she predicted.

She plopped down a pile of documents atop her desk, situated in her study. Her study room was smaller than the Prince's. And in further contrast, cute accessories adorned every nook and cranny of the room. Even so, most of the books displayed at its bookshelves didn't match with the image of a princess.

"Haven't you been taught by brother? In negotiating with someone, before presenting your truest terms, you'd start off with higher demands as to feign a compromise later on. ... That way, they'll have believed they got a better deal than what was originally and be predisposed to accepting it as is." (Leticia)

Well said, I thought as laughter escaped me.

"..... And for that very reason, I was cajoled into mentioning the majority of my relationship with Iris... What a troublesome lady...."(Ludy)

"Fufufu...Looks like you're exaggerating quite a bit. And it seems brother

was aware of it all along.” (Leticia)

“..... That’s true.”(Ludy)

Now that I think about it, it was that contorted [1] expression he had made... perhaps... Perhaps it was at that time Prince Alfred had realized what Princess Letty wanted. Nevertheless, he still danced to her tune, in consideration for... her feelings?

She sat on the chair accompanying her study desk. It was a white-based, lovely desk; it was a desk that makes one able to catch a glimpse of the mirages of the royal children who have come and gone throughout the generations, toiling away at their letters on that very same desk... But the real scene, grounded in reality... piles upon piles of documents, crushing the imagination beneath their weight.

“Well, I will keep to my word. But... If I were to, say, take a stroll within the Capital, and during that, just so happened upon the Daughter of Duke Armelia, you wouldn’t have any complaints, right?” (Leticia)

“Like I asked, why are you being so hasty...” (Ludy)

The strife for the time being has been assuaged, and Iris should still be in the capital for a while longer. After all, there were various relief efforts instated to deal with the aftermath left in the wake of Prince Edward’s meddlings.

“Eeh. I only speak the truth when I say that I want to meet with the Daughter of Duke Armelia.”(Leticia)

“... Why do you concern for her? Well, yes, I suppose it can’t be helped if you became intrigued after seeing your beloved brother heartbroken.”  
(Ludy)

“ ..... You’re right. It is as Ludy says. But it does not pertain to a feeling of “Don’t take my brother away” like you imagine, you know?” (Leticia)

She effortlessly saw through me. Moreover, she was able to deny it in such a way that rendered me speechless and awaiting her next word.

But keeping quiet just made her giggle even more...

“Of course, I harbour a bit of that feeling. ... To put it simply, it piqued my interest. For example... “That brother [2] of mine” is restricted to a very small world. He has been protected by Ellia ever since he was young, and for a long time now, the people around never spoke ill of him. Isn’t the result of that his disengagement to the Daughter of Duke Armelia?”  
(Leticia)

I soon understood ‘That brother of mine’ was referring to Prince Edward. Princess Letty has always called him that when she mentioned him.

“In a different way, however, my brother’s world [3] is ‘small’ as well. His world is composed of only me and Ludy. Other than us... he has only allowed someone else at his side to serve as a tool... or so I think.” (Leticia)

I finally comprehended what she meant by that ...Certainly, it seems that Prince Alfred’s world too is small like Prince Edward’s, but in a different sense.

It isn’t a matter of his world view being ‘narrow’, but a matter of whether or not he seeks the existence of true companionship. A relationship not based on convenience... But rather, based on being able to forgive, exchange opinions, and have small talk. A person with whom he can do ordinary, every-day things with. Princess Letty, and after that, myself, have tried to become someone like that to him... Or something along those lines.

“For a royal, maybe it was unavoidable. But I think that brother, in this case, took it to the extreme.... I might’ve been the one to seal his fate, because he had to carry a burden such as I in the Royal Palace’s environment, a place filled with adversaries...” (Leticia)

\*Huff\*, Princess Letty let out a sigh.

“ ... No, I don’t think that excuses it. Those who have worked under him were swayed by their own pragmatic judgement of cost and benefit, and as such, they were drawn to brother’s capabilities. That is indeed one of brother’s strong points, but... that kind of strength is too fragile to found lasting subordination upon. If you want to put it in a naive way, maybe it is due to.. a peculiar bond? If I were to take, say... a time where brother

would make a miscalculation, if no sense of loyalty existed in that scenario, they would withdraw and re-evaluate having served him.”  
(Leticia)

I see. She raises a valid point. Currently, there are budding and lesser nobles who are under the influence of Prince Alfred. They have arrived at Prince Alfred’s side after attaining solid achievements themselves. In the end, they will choose to side with the more competent prince... Well, if they pitted him against someone like Prince Edward, naturally, Prince Alfred would emerge as the obvious choice.

Looking at it from a different angle, if we’re talking about an identical but hypothetical scenario where there were those forced to align with a side, had there been an opponent who equaled Prince Alfred in terms of ability and status, they would be indifferent enough to come to the conclusion that “either is fine”.

Initially, when the confrontation with Prince Edwards was highlighted, many of the ones who remained neutral may have come to the same conclusion.

“... This time, the biggest reason as to why the neutral faction is slightly inclined to him is probably accredited to the Duke of Armelia favoring him. So, then, why did Duke Armelia endorse him? Without question, I would have thought that it was just a front. But, could they have kept quiet watch while a prominent house was involved? Worst case scenario, they’ll make use of his daughter’s excommunication as a pretext to leave his post and withdraw to his territory, effectively eluding the turmoil.. Yet he remains the family head, and has even begun publicly cooperating as Prince Alfred’s hands and feet.....” (Leticia)

“... Is it because... he felt indebted to him?” (Ludy)

“That’s right. Do you really think that Duke of Armelia would willingly offer his assistance to brother, even with the apparent risk of splitting the country in two should he choose a side, and without any compensation?”  
(Leticia)

“... Is it something he had acquired unpremeditated...” (Ludy)

“Right. ... Then, looking at ‘the aftermath’ of said confrontation, doesn’t it make you think we need to expand the amount of our so called ‘allies’? Ludy.” (Leticia)

“ ..... To strengthen the crown’s rule, is it...” (Ludy)

“Right again. In these times of peace, it wouldn’t be impossible to unify the lords with brother’s strength, like all past kings. Well, even at a warring time, it seems he wouldn’t have a problem with taking command of the army as king; he had made splendid connections with many of the military officers, owing to his time posed as Dean.” (Leticia)

..... Surely, as Princess Letty said, only the army, with grandfather as its leader and overseer, would have realized that Dean, who slipped into their training sessions frequently, was Prince Alfred in disguise. He blended in well. There, he acted not as a member of the royalty, but as Dean, as to not build any walls between him and others.

“ ... Though the talks have been derailed, brother must first consolidate his own camp in order to accelerate the royalty’s reinforcements, for future’s sake... Or so I believe.” (Leticia)

“I see... Uhm, Princess Letty?” (Ludy)

“ ... What is it?” (Leticia)

“ ..... Princess Letty, you really never did experience the outside world, right?” (Ludy)

Unprecedentedly, all I’ve done so far was listen to what Princess Letty had to say. Well, usually, you wouldn’t hear this kind of talk from a girl as young as her. Even if you take into account that she was a member of the royalty.

“ ..... Something the matter? To so suddenly...” (Leticia)

“Oh, it just seemed as if you could personally relate to these stories..”  
(Ludy)

“ ..... It’s the other way around. Since I was captive to this cage, I want to know at least a little of the outside world, so all I can do is speculate about

it.” (Leticia)

“ ..... I suppose it’s something like that.” (Ludy)

“Yes, it is.” (Leticia)

It was regrettable, in my opinion. Even from the standpoint of an outsider, considering the aptitude she has displayed thus far, it’s clear that she didn’t have the chance to fully utilize her talents.

“I don’t regret it at all, Ludy. Because, I have never made a connection on my own. Anybody could apply that consideration to the event in question, right?” (Leticia)

... Not just anybody could do that. Just how much does Princess Letty overestimate other people? It’s harmful for a human being to abstain from making any personal connections.

I mean, Princess Letty, weren’t you able to accurately guess what was on my mind just now? I don’t think that you would have a problem in negotiating with such a skill in your arsenal.

Now that I take a closer look, she is smiling.... could she have, yet again, perfectly predicted what’s currently running through my mind? I found the thought amusing and laughed at the notion.

\*

Footnotes:

1. 苦虫を噛んだ. (Nigamushi o kanda). If translated directly it would be “Chewed a bitter bug.” It’s an expression like, yeah, chewing a bitter bug. And Matty decided it to be “contorted.”

2. Letticia call Alfred as お兄様(onii-sama) and Edward as あの兄(ano ani).

3. World as in ‘social world.’

# Chapter 76: Little Sister's Strategy (3)

\*Ludy POV

“...I was taken aback, you know? That brother of mine, showing interest in other people? As well as paying attention to those he encountered? Brother always ridiculed anybody who would dare try becoming a part of his ‘world’, you and I being the exceptions, of course. Hey, Ludy...?”  
(Leticia)

“What is it?” (Ludy)

“...I wonder if I should ask for your opinion, since you’re related to her. From your own perspective, what kind of person is the Daughter of Duke Armelia?” (Leticia)

“...She is a noblewoman to the core, for better or worse...” (Ludy)

“In a bad way, too...?” (Leticia)

“Yes... She was, from what I could gather, a proud being. She has enough strength to stand on her own two feet. And for that reason, she stood firm in the face of her engagement’s annulment. The result of that led to her new authority over her company and fief.” (Ludy)

“...I see. In a way, she is similiar to brother. Don’t you agree?” (Leticia)

“I do... Her pride does not permit any display of weakness. She won’t let herself rely on anyone but herself. How she handled being harassed within the academy is also indicative of it... And although she could’ve acted discreetly, she chose not to, and instead confronted the issue head-on with bravado. Or rather, even if the harassment hadn’t occurred... She still could’ve donned the facade of a damsel in distress, altering the impression placed upon her.” (Ludy)

She moved with undue grandeur and poise. As a result, her name was incriminated and she had to shoulder all the crimes herself in the end.

...Even if I didn’t know of her circumstances...there were many others besides her who joined in bullying the Baron’s daughter.



That might also be the case. Because the second Prince, the first son of the Duke, the son of the Knight general, and the son of the Pope... essentially the highest lineage in this country, had lined up to serve a baron's daughter, whose power was at the lower bracket of high society. It was possible for the other nobles to not be pleased with the Baron's daughter's new allies.

But even when all was said and done, it was still impossible for Iris to confront the Baron's daughter directly, for Iris had suddenly become Prince Edward's clique "favorite". For those who also bullied the Baron's daughter, the only way around taking the blame themselves was to deftly use Iris as a scapegoat for their unsightly harassment. They first evaded those who questioned their actions, and then shifted all the blame onto Iris.

If only Iris carried herself better. Had Iris behaved well in the eyes of those around her, she wouldn't have been taken down by such a humiliating farce.

In any case, the harassment she executed was petty in comparison to the circulating rumors and rampant bouts of sarcasm from other nobles...

Yes, put the gravity of those two instances side by side.. And what Iris did seems almost.. cute...

At any rate, it is quite detrimental to say something disagreeable towards the daughter of a Duke. Even in this nation, a woman such as herself can hold a lot of power.

The evil intentions of noble society are terrifying. Compared to what others of the same echelon did, Iris's actions seemed harmless.

"Even now, her attitude remains unchanged... Though she had servants she could confide in, their relationships had been built on "trust (credibility)". A line had to be drawn somewhere, so Iris had decided that she could not bare her weaknesses to them because there was a part of her that had to be protected at all costs." (Ludy)

But after that incident, they became irreplaceable existences to her — aside from her servants, it became difficult for her to learn to trust anyone

else. It felt as if she has since mixed up “trust (credibility)” with “trust(reliance)”.

“Indeed. In a way, they really are like peas in a pod. It’s just... perhaps she really is a good person, but is not seen as one due to her rigid morals.”  
(Leticia)

Fuuh, Princess Letty let out a sigh.

“...If brother truly feels frustrated whenever he sees her, I would hope that you assist him in this matter, even if for a miniscule amount.”  
(Leticia)

“Haha... but I think this has incited change in him. After all, it was the first I’ve seen him bustling around in such a way. He even severed ties to his important ‘hand’ for her sake.” (Ludy)

Even Prince Alfred would need some tricks up his sleeve to make a connection with the church interior. But, in any case, the Pope’s authority within the church was all-encompassing and absolute. So naturally, it was a difficult task to find and string together a connection with a high ranking church member who was not under the influence of the Pope.

And, instead of using this connection himself, the prince gave it to Iris instead... Well, he may have thought it would be more effective, given the timing.

“So it was like that, huh... Out of curiosity, how close do you think they are?” (Leticia)

“The only progress he’s made on that end is grasping a hold of the question... of whether or not he has feelings for her.. ” (Ludy)

“Oh, my! So, has brother made preparations for the next step?” (Leticia)

“No, that’s.....” (Ludy)

“Good grief.. It seems brother is still a good-for-nothing when it comes to the matters of the heart. And on the other side of things, Lady Iris is likely also oblivious to the possibility..” (Leticia)

I narrowly managed to bar my tongue from voicing the words I was

about to say.

“I implore you to understand. There must be a reason for his inability to move forward.” (Ludy)

“If It’s brother we’re talking about, no matter how difficult the predicament, he will always strive towards his goal. And you won’t convince me otherwise, even if you present me with a ‘cool’ phrase.” (Leticia)

Due to my ties with the second prince having been completely cut, I could no longer provide any further objections to her statement .

“As for me, it would be better if he were to move to a more welcoming c- i-..... No, nevermind that. It’s nothing. As his sister, I support his decision from the bottom of my heart.” (Leticia)

Although I thought I heard the beginnings of a disturbing word, I decided not to press any further. Princess Letty wouldn’t do anything strange, not so soon.

# Chapter 77: Little Sister's Strategy (4)

[Ludy's POV]

Princess Leticia quietly stood up and turned her back to me while walking towards the window.

She contemplated her future, casting her gaze out the window and taking in the vast, expansive scenery.

"... Do you remember when we first met, Ludy?" (Leticia)

"Of course. When I first met you, I had been brought to the castle by Alfred and you were hiding behind him the entire time, trying to conceal your face because you were too shy." (Ludy)

"... Ah, such an embarrassing thing to do." (Leticia)

Letty agreed somewhat bashfully, and I smiled while recalling these nostalgic memories.

"It was quite fun. I was very happy at the time. You often played in the garden behind the castle, right? When I was younger, I wasn't allowed to step foot outside of the castle. The castle was already heavy with tension, and I could never visit the Royal Palace either. You enjoy keeping my Elder Brother company, am I right? ... Grandmother, Elder Brother, and you are the world to me." (Leticia)

"... Letty..." (Ludy)

"Ludy, please don't make that face. I'm very happy, you know. Certainly, I don't know what it's like to mingle within a group or what kind of environment a school may have, and I don't know about the matters people of the same generation talk about ... but I can understand what lies beyond all that superficiality." (Leticia)

Ever since she was young, she could never partake in life outside of her cage... Indeed, she lives in a situation wherein her life is similar to that of a caged bird. Her caged life helped her understand the current political battlefield and the feud with Elliya for the throne.

“Somehow, my grandmother doesn’t understand my desire to visit the outside world. Thankfully, Elder Brother doesn’t see me as a pawn to be used in a limited life.” (Leticia)

Speaking of how she’s been trapped, without a doubt, Leticia could have been forced to marry a lord for the sake of pulling his house to Alfred’s side.

“Additionally, it is impossible for Elder Brother to marry anyone under these circumstances.” (Leticia)

“Well, about the marriage of “that Onii-Sama” and the low-born woman, it may spell trouble for them if a child is born with a weakened bloodline.” (Leticia)

It is as Leticia says. For that very reason, Alfred is suppressing Edward’s influence.

“What if the Baron’s daughter bears children by the time Prince Alfred removes Prince Edward from the Royal Family?”

The Royal Family had few direct descendants. They were Prince Alfred, Prince Edward, and Princess Leticia.

Currently, Prince Alfred and Prince Edward were vying for the throne. To ensure Prince Edward was crowned king, his faction dragged many nobles into the dispute. Should Edward’s faction lose, at best, they would be imprisoned for life, and at worst, they would be sentenced to death.

Hypothetically speaking...and by no means do I envision this ever occurring...should Prince Alfred lose, there was a nine in ten chance that the cold face of death would greet him. It was very unlikely that Elliya would stop at punishment as light as imprisonment. Therefore, Prince Alfred was also fighting an uphill battle...

Back to the topic at hand.

The winner will remain in power, whereas the loser will be expelled from the Royal Family. Hypothetically speaking, if Princess Letty were married and with a child before Prince Alfred claims the throne, then only Prince Alfred and her child would be in line for the throne.

In this situation, the one married to Princess Letty would certainly think this:

If “something” were to happen to Prince Alfred, my house would give rise to the new Royal Family.

... In other words, that would spark a civil war.

Yes, they want to stop the Queen Dowager from supporting Prince Alfred at all costs.

“Didn’t Elder Brother discourage me from entering any political marriages that could have benefited his faction to keep me out of Elliya’s sights? He made everyone believe I had a weak constitution in order to keep me out of the limelight... Really, Brother has done nothing but protect me, hasn’t he?” (Leticia)

“ ... It is proof of how much he dotes upon you, Princess Letty.” (Ludy)

“ ... Fufufu. You’re right ... In that case, I wonder if my marriage could decide Elder Brother’s victory? Aah ... if Alfred were to be defeated, that damn Brother could marry me into a foreign country for personal gain.” (Leticia)

... Hearing Princess Letty utter the word “marriage” pained my heart a little.

But it was only for a moment; perhaps it was just a fleeting emotion... and so I refocused on my conversation with Princess Letty.

“ ... The possibility makes me anxious, and I’ve grown quite lonely without you and Elder Brother in the castle. As I thought, the past was the most enjoyable time.” (Leticia)

Princess Letty showed a melancholic smile after she said that. Drawn in by that smile, my face became serious as I felt a renewed dedication to the lonely siblings.

“... Ludy, we must win. For Brother, for the Daughter of Duke Armelia, and for my own sake.” (Leticia)

“That’s right.” (Ludy)

“For the moment, we need a countermeasure to address the Armelia Fief’s trade disturbance. Since it concerns Elder Brother, have you done anything about it yet?” (Leticia)

“Eeh, well.....” (Ludy)

“I will do my part to help in any way that I can.” (Leticia)

Princess Letty ended the conversation with a smile.

# Chapter 78: Sei's Conviction (1)

(Iris's POV)

"... This time was truly difficult, wasn't it?"

While we were drinking tea, I heard such words. Mimosa, who was reclining in front of me, expressed her condolences. We are currently in the villa of Duke Armelia... in other words, my home in the royal capital.

"Well, that is true... I was almost branded a heretic, after all." (Iris) "Your life is too hectic." (Mimosa)

Hearing those words, I gave a bitter smile... But it surfaced rather involuntarily.

"So, you didn't reply to my letter...? Or meet with me because of your stay in the capital after publicly proving your innocence...?" (Mimosa) A week has passed since the audience. Although I craved to return home, I cannot yet.

In the first place, I need to resolve the chaos of our employees resigning from our royal capital branch store left and right; and then I need to see if the firm can be exempted from tolls..

To be frank, because the fief is surrounded by people from the second prince's faction, the efforts regarding the tolls are not going well.

Everyone forced me to take a break since I had been working non-stop for the week after the interrogation, so my meeting with Mimosa today was the first of us meeting in a while.

"I am genuinely sorry about all the hardships you have suffered." (Iris) "There is no need for an apology. The way I spoke was too harsh. I have also heard that you have been pushing yourself without rest... I should be thanking you for giving some of your valuable time to me." (Mimosa) "The same goes for me. Even if you were to stop caring about me, it couldn't be helped. You have my sincere gratitude for always taking care of me." (Iris) Despite my expulsion from the academy, she still kept in touch with me.



Even when I was interrogated before, she also sent a letter that full of concern.

And even when I was going through the interrogation, she sent a letter full of concern for me.

... I truly appreciate her remaining my friend.

“Come to think of it, the branch store in the capital has resumed business, right?” (Mimosa) “Tentatively, however. Right now, people from my fief are operating the store, but once the new employees get used to the work, they will take full responsibility for running the store.” (Iris) More than half of the people who came from the fief to help were focused on product development.

I tried to let them experience the flood of a business, because I thought that it would be a good idea to give them the feel of an on-site environment.

If the new employees got used to the hard work, I will give the workers from the fief a raise and send them back home to do their usual business.

“Yes. The store became quite crowded since e we were closed for such a long time.” (Iris) “Oh my, did you go there yourself?” (Mimosa)

“Not quite. I was considering going but... I gave up halfway, due to the crowds. It seems that it will settle down within a week.” (Iris) “Oh... while I am happy about that, will it be okay? If I’m not mistaken, Melida has come home dead tired every day.” (Mimosa) Indeed... even if I were to go, there wasn’t anything I could do.

However, I want to see the situation with my own eyes...

“..... Shall we go to the firm?” (Iris)

“Would that be alright?” (Mimosa)

“Yes. The store is open again, yet I haven’t witnessed the situation first-hand before... I wonder if I would ever get another chance to see it I could. Tanya, prepare fruit juice for the employees to enjoy.” (Iris) “... Are the employees allowed to drink something like that?” (Mimosa) Tanya quietly

acknowledged my order by nodding, but Mimosa tilted her head in curiosity.

“Yes, as a refreshment. A reward for their labors.” (Iris)

“So you also do things such as that...” (Mimosa)

Her eyes rounded in surprise.

“I am not aware if other firms act in such a manner, but a store cannot function without its employees, right?” (Iris) ... The incident this time was truly scathing.

“Especially because the store seems so busy as of late.” (Iris)

And then, Tanya, Mimosa, and I departed from the mansion with many trustworthy guards to escort us.

“It has been a while since I went outside like this.” (Iris)

I dressed in an inconspicuous manner, similar to when I did my inspections, and also dyed my hair.

My hair is now a reddish brown, instead of its usual silver.

This dye was also a new product from the Azuta firm.

The dye is made from various plants, and will wear off in two to three days.

This new product from the research and development department left me in awe .

This product was naturally a part of that.

Will they become ecstatic when they eventually can make a black hair dye that can mask grey and white hairs?

But with how colorful the natural hair is in this world, white hair isn't deemed a problem.

Rather, if I were to think of a grey haired old man... mhm, perceived to be elegant and striking.

That being said, there wasn't a high demand for that anyway...

While considering those things during our walk, we arrived at the store.

# Chapter 79: Sei's Conviction (2)

[Iris' POV]

The shop was so crowded that the line to get in extended outside the door and snaked into a horde of people.

Although I've read the reports, seeing it for myself makes for an entirely different experience.

I knew that it was crowded from the flood of sales, the rapidly declining stock, the sheer amount of equipment orders, and other store records. I also knew that I had to address those reports eventually.

When I saw the scene myself, however... I was, once again, astonished.

"... I think the shop is much busier than last I saw it." (Mimosa) Mimosa side-eyed me as he stated his opinion.

"It seems so... But this level of activity is ideal, I suppose." (Iris) The shop is so jam-packed that there is virtually no vacant space as far as the eye can see...

Even the line for the accounting services is exuberantly long.

For any business owner, a sight like this is enough to make them dance with joy.

We entered from the back of the shop through the employee only entrance, leading directly to the store interior.

"Ah, Lady Iris, Mister Sei, welcome." (Manager)

The Manager spotted us and promptly came over and bowed.

"Please lift your head. We're only here to deliver something." (Ryle) Ryle wore a wry smile as he held out a box to The Manager.

".... A delivery?" (Manager)

The Manager seemed to be in disbelief and muttered the phrase again.

He quite blatantly wanted to know the meaning behind this, but he didn't press any further. However, the Manager probably didn't want to

seem rude.

In reaction to this, I too put on a wry smile.

“Yes. Business has been flourishing in abundance lately, and I suspect all of the employees grow weary after yet another hard day of work; and so, I decided to bring juices for everyone to enjoy.” (Iris) “Oh, thank you very much.” (Manager)

The Manager received the box from Ryle.

“Is there enough juice for all the employees? Or is it insufficient?” (Iris) “No, this is enough. Things have been relatively calm compared to the prior week...” (Manager) Suddenly, right when those words left his lips.

Clash..! There was a loud cracking noise followed by a scream.

[Iris' POV]

Without hesitation, Ryle and Dida rushed to shield me with their bodies.

My body was caught in between a wall and Ryle.

The Manager immediately left for the front of the store.

“Dida,” I called out to him, “We’ll be fine so go after the Manager and assess the situation.” (Iris) Dida frowned upon hearing my words.

“Princess, my duty is to your safety, you know?” (Dida) He said that with a grave tone.

“But you also need to ascertain the danger, right?” (Iris) Dida sighed. I wasn’t sure if it was due to him succumbing to my suggestion, or whether he genuinely agreed that surveying a situation first is a must.

“... Argh. I understand. Ryle, I leave the Princess in your care.” (Dida) “Of course.” (Ryle)

And then Dida ran to the store front as well.

The next to move was Ryle. He already had a firm grasp of the building’s structure from his past countless inspections.

“This way.” (Ryle)

He guided us to the office, which doubled as a reception room.

There are numerous desks lined up as a workspace. And at one end of the room was a reception desk lined up with chairs, divided up by a partitioning screen.

I sat on one of those chairs.

At that moment, a man who looked to be an employee came inside and knocked on the door side.

“ ..... E, excuse me. Is Mister Sei here?” (Employee)

Ryle, whose name was called, rose from his seating and walked in front of him.

“Yes. Is there something wrong?” (Ryle)

“Mister Dida has apprehended the culprit who was causing the commotion and told me that he wanted to meet with Mister Sei urgently..  
“

Ha~ I sighed in relief after hearing those words. If it's Dida, he would have no problem detaining the culprit.

..... Even so, for what reason did Dida call for Ryle?

“Me, is it...? Are you sure that is for whom he called?” (Ryle) Ryle asked back for affirmation. It seems he had the same inquiry in mind as I.

“Y,yes... Mister Dida said we should talk about this matter in the store rather than behind closed doors; the culprit keeps shouting, ‘Bring out the boss of this place!’. (Employee) “Understood. In that case, we shall go.”  
(Iris)

# Chapter 80: Sei's Conviction (3)

The moment Sei exited the room, I stood and gave chase.

“Milady?” (Ryle, Tanya)

Following my attempt to leave, Ryle and Tanya worriedly called out after me in unison.

“Wo-worry not.. I’m merely going to observe from a distance. “ (Iris)

“You shouldn’t. It’s dangerous.” (Ryle)

Ryle rebuked my course of action. Him being my escort, it’s only natural that he would find my willingness to approach the eye of the storm to be outrageous.

I gave Ryle a solemn stare, but the look on his face mirrored my own. It seems we’ve come to an impasse.

“.. There are employees working under me, including Sei and Dida, at the place of disturbance.” (Iris)

I averted my eyes from Ryle whilst telling him my reasoning.

“This company is my responsibility. The person in charge should be the one to face the problem themselves... And that person just so happens to be me, responsible for assuring the safety of its employees so that they may go about their duties securely and at ease. Please, Ryle, do not stop me from assuming this role.” (Iris)

“But, Lady Iris..” (Ryle)

“Besides, must you ‘guard’ me by precluding me from my duties...? Ryle.. my confidence in this pursuit is born from my trust in you.” (Iris)

“But... No, all right, I’ll respect your decision. Try not to expose your being there to the opposing party.” (Ryle)

With a nod, I left the room, with Ryle in tow and begrudgingly approving of my resolution.

I hurried towards the shouting voice coming from the front of the shop.

“... It has been a while, Mr Damme.” (Sei)

Sei's voice stuck out from the racket surging from the crowd.

My sight scanned the entirety of the store until it glimpsed upon Sei and Dida.

One man was getting arrested, stripped of freedom by Dida.

“At your behest, I have shown myself to you... So might you now explain why a ‘Former Employee’ is the cause for this pandemonium?” (Sei)

After Sei's voice swept across the room, all became deathly quiet; it was as if the previous ruckus became a dispersed illusion.

Even if the content of his words wasn't imposing itself, the threat was undoubtedly implied.

An angry Sei is a frightening experience for any beholders.

“ ..... “

The man was evidently overwhelmed by Sei. Discerning this reaction, Sei intentionally heaved out a sigh.

“Keeping your lips sealed, huh... I, as the supervisor, have the responsibility of overseeing this establishment so that the customers may browse our wares at their leisure. Under usual circumstances, we would've already had you handed over to the proper authorities and this would've been finished by now. But.. since I was courteous enough to give you this opportunity to speak for yourself, it would be in your best interest to seize it.” (Sei)

“ ... I-.. I'm not at fault here!” (Damme)

“Playing innocent this late in the game, huh.. “ (Sei)

Sei heaved a sigh for the second time now. Well, inciting such a commotion and then claiming innocence is a bit....

“I'm not playing innocent! It wasn't my fault! I have worked at this firm and produced results. And I have these results from working until I was bare bones. Yet.. when I applied for reinstatement, I was so easily brushed



away...” (Damme)

“... If memory serves me right, weren't you the one to quit after being lured into another company? In that case, why can't you just produce the same results over there?” (Sei)

I was thoroughly convinced in Sei's reasoning. Basically, this man.. Damme, was it? He was the one to defect to the firm under Prince Edward's control.

“Wh-... Well... it may be so... But I came to understand that I could make better use of my capabilities in this company. That is why I submitted an application for reinstatement... So to just be cast aside like this...” (Damme)

“In any case, you are suggesting that we re-admit you... You, a man who gladly joined another firm, and then nonchalantly submitted for reinstatement ... ?” (Sei)

“Bu-But... Isn't it only natural that you accept people of my caliber with pleasure?! I was once in charge of cooking for this store! If you were to hire me again, you would see immediate results!” (Damme)

“You certainly did give an excellent performance while still at our firm..” (Sei)

“ ... Then....” (Damme)

“But if I may speak candidly, we already have a multitude of employees at your skill level,” Sei declared to him coldly.

“Certainly, you may possess those skills right from the get go. But now, even those without any initial skills strive hard to obtain them, and in the long run, achieve much more than people like you who are stuck in their ways due to pride... Did you honestly believe I wouldn't look at one's work ethic? Sure, skill is important, but that's not the whole of it. Suppose there was someone with your level of ability: between you, someone content in their skills and is prone to turn-coating in a state of crisis, or a hard worker who would remain loyal in the face of it... I don't need to state which one I would choose, now, do I...?(Sei)

Sei pierced the man with his glare. That man, the man called Damme, could do nothing but quake with fear in response to it.

.... Really, Sei's intensity is something else...

# Chapter 81: Sei's Conviction (4)

[Iris' POV]

“... So you say, but a woman who left the company around the same time as I got re-employed. In fact, she's right there!” (Damme) Damme pointed at a woman dressed as a waitress by the cash register, to which she trembled in response.

Just as I was about to appear before and retort to Damme, my promise with Ryle came to mind and kept me in check.

Sei walked to shield the girl from view, and then he spoke out, “... She was on maternity leave. Since she filed for it, I was made aware of the circumstances and gave her express permission to come back. It is a wholly different matter from yours; so then, why did you inquire about her?”

“.... Well, humph. I didn't know if it was for maternity leave or whatever, but there are a ton of women in this firm who only serve to stock items or work at the register. And although that woman was able to return, I for some reason cannot. This company is clearly prone to favoritism.. or do you believe that to be unfounded? How about you and that woman over there?” (Damme) I had to suppress the festering urge to respond to his outrageous claim with every fiber of my being.

My body trembled in anger as I tried to, once more, arrest my urge to retort.

The pits of my stomach lit up with passion, hungry to correct his statement.

This was an insult to the company; it was an insult to Sei; it was an insult that spurned all working women.

Ah, for what reason did this man provoke me? It might be the time to exercise the state power of a duke's daughter, similar to the time in the Academy.

To hold my tongue.. would be impossible. However, as soon as I opened

my mouth to let my feelings erupt from it, a harsh voice rung throughout the room.

“... Do not make light of a woman’s capabilities. Listening to your nonsensical gibberish is nauseating.” (Dida) Dida and Sei cast a sharp glare at Damme. Dida strengthened his grip upon Damme, whose face now distorted in pain.

“Carrying merchandise, accounting... Well, they do certainly seem like monotonous jobs. But it is because of that very same work that the shop manages to function well. From my standpoint, the work you were doing and work she is doing are of equal importance. The job hierarchy isn’t everything. Either way, she is an important member of our workforce, able to do her job with efficiency, competency, and proficiency.” (Sei) “Ow, ow, ow, ow! It hurts!!” (Damme)

Damme was more focused on the pain than Sei’s insight.

“Oops, my bad. When Damme’s denouncement of women reached my ears, I flew into an unsightly state of rage.” (Dida) Dida’s apology was not directed at Damme, but rather, at Sei for interrupting him. Sei received Dida’s apology with a bitter smile.

Sei received Dida’s apology with a bitter smile.

“Upon retirement, you receive your pension and a bonus; but leave the company for good. That is different from a leave as the person in question is bound to come back after their period of absence is over.” (Sei) Then, Sei turned to the waitress and remarked: “First of all, in the documents that received signatures when we hired people, it is clearly stated that leave of absence and retirement are different. We also explained it beforehand... You heard the explanation, then you still left the company, correct?” (Sei) “Well, yes. When Mr. Sei asked me why I wanted to quit, he asked for my reason. I told him about expecting a child, and the need to take care of the newborn. Then Mr. Sei asked me about what I would do after taking care of the baby. I told him that I would look for a new job. Right after I said that, Mr. Sei proposed that I take a leave of absence instead of leaving the company for good. To be honest, it is a very time-

consuming hassle to find a new job, and I am very thankful to Mr. Sei for offering me the option to return after leaving for a short period of time.” (Waitress) The audience gasped in shock and surprise.

The leave of absence system was a new one, implemented solely by our company. The reactions from the audience made sense; it was only natural. It took a quite long time to introduce and implement.

“Truly? Astounding!! I also want to work here! We can’t get by only with our husbands’ salaries, and considering the child on its own matter is difficult to say...” (Audience) “Certainly. I’ll put it in layman’s terms: basically, I have to quit my job whenever I give birth to a child; however, in this company, after giving birth, I could go back and work the same way I did before. It’s a shame that this company is the only one employing that system!” (Audience) The female customers thought the same, agreeing in their minds. No doubt, it was difficult for women to work under such harsh conditions.

Although working women in Japan face the same issues about gender equality, it is more severe here because of the lack of women’s rights.

It would be nice if there were families to depend on near here, but most of the kingdom’s people have many family members. On top of that, there’s no place that can babysit children.

In any case, it may be good to make a facility like a nursery for working women.

The waitress commented,

“Thank you. In other words, what Damme is saying is an accusation and slander towards our company.” (Waitress) Sei thanked the waitress and only then it seemed that the cold atmosphere that he had exuded had at last ended.

However;

“After leaving the company, you became independent. However, I never intended to restrict your freedom, even if you joined a separate company. That is, until you caused a ruckus at this store. Now, you are...” (Sei) Sei

turned to face Damme again, but his eyes were cold enough to pierce her heart. Damme trembled in the face of Sei's glare.

"This circumstance will never happen again. This time, I will stop the guards from killing you. But if such an incident happens again, I will use different methods." (Sei) Sei whispered to Damme with a bone-chilling voice. Damme knew that if an incident like this were to happen again, he would be dead immediately.

He smiled as Damme trembled wildly before him.

"Oh, a local guard came. Dida, hand him over to them." (Sei)

"... Is that really okay?" (Dida)

"Yes." (Sei)

Sei nodded as Dida handed Damme over to the guard. He didn't resist or even struggle, instead looking at Sei with dim, lifeless eyes.

# Chapter 82: Sei's Offense

[Iris' POV]

After Damme was taken away, the inside of the shop immediately buzzed with noise.

"I apologize for the trouble, everyone." (Sei)

Sei stood in the center of the shop and publicly apologized to the customers.

"All items that were ordered just now will be free of charge as an apology to the customers present. We will also present a discount coupon to each customer to further show our sincerity." (Sei) Sei declared the reparation with a slightly larger voice than his apology.

I'm worried about what the reaction from the crowd will be...

However, the response proved that my worries were unnecessary.

Surprisingly, an applause rose out from the guests.

Sei was also surprised as he looked over the guests after his declaration. In fact, there was even a slight wrinkle in between his eyebrows.

When I gazed back at the customers, about a third of them were very pleased that the items they recently purchased had suddenly become free.

They were gladly eating their chocolate after clapping wholeheartedly while lamenting the fact that they did not purchase more before.

As for the remaining 70%...

"What are their names?" (Woman 1)

"The one who spoke just now is Mr. Sei, and the knight-like person beside him is Mr. Dida." (Woman 2) "How gallant..." (Everyone)

Stunned by Sei and Dida's charm, all of the women present etched the images of Sei and Dida into their hearts.

"I feel refreshed. A guy who looks down on others like that must be punished." (Guest 1) "I wholeheartedly agree. Women should disregard

what he said. Well, I don't think this incident can repeat again." (Guest 2)  
The rest of the audience felt refreshed after seeing someone beat Damme for his outrageous remarks. They sympathized with the waitress after knowing the full circumstances.

After looking at the reactions of the customers, I let out a sigh of relief. I had been holding my breath the entire time: apprehensive of the guests' reactions.

I wonder if this is okay...

At that moment, I realized that suppressing my emotions had sapped all of my strength. It was to the point where I wanted to sit down somewhere and rest.

"Lady Iris...!" (Tanya)

Tanya immediately ran over to my side the moment she realized that I wasn't feeling well.

"I'm okay, Tanya. Thank you." (Iris)

"Please do not make me worry too much..." (Tanya)

"I kept my promise with Ryle, right?" (Iris)

I said that with a wry smile. However, Tanya's complexion did not smooth out.

"I was anxious about the actions you would take when Sei was punishing Damme. My lady, you are not fine at all." (Tanya) "Is that so?" (Iris)

"Yes. That is the case at the moment. Usually, you have no problem being in crowded places." (Tanya) "... That is true..." (Iris)

Even I was utterly convinced by Tanya's flawless logic.

"Certainly, my anger is very rare and it is easy for me to become fatigued... and faint after becoming enraged." (Iris) With a bitter smile, Tanya articulated, "It seems that Lady Iris is blaming herself for the incident." (Tanya) This time, Tanya didn't scold me too much, which I was relieved for.



“... Lady Iris. After Dida had seized Damme this time, I briefly thought for a moment that... The responsibility of my lady and that of ours are very different. I began to think that apart from the responsibility of Lady Iris' employees, we also have our own roles that we must fulfill. That role is to protect Lady Iris... That role is our pride and every thought. We are obligated to take care for you and protect you when you need it, so please try to minimize the situations where you put yourself in danger. Please keep that in mind.” (Tanya) “I cannot promise that.” (Iris)

“Lady Iris...” (Tanya)

“Even knowing full well that you are worried, I will definitely repeat the same mistakes over and over. Therefore, I cannot make that promise.” (Iris) I know that someday, I will run into a similar situation such as this one. A situation where I want to hold myself back as much as possible but can't due to the outrageousness of the person's claims. But...

“However, that does not mean I am totally ignoring your advice. Everyone will surely protect me. It is undebatable. I am reckless because I trust you guys more than anyone. That's why I'm going to be as reckless as possible. It's because I am confident everyone can do their jobs.” (Iris) The reason I dare to be as reckless as I am is because I trust them. As a result, in the case of an emergency, I might do a reckless action and annoy everyone.

... This time it was okay because the result was satisfactory.

“Come on, let's go back to the employee area again to help hinder the crowding in the shop... Tanya” (Iris) “Yes.” (Tanya)

“It seems that a good amount of people have lined up in front of Sei to receive their coupons. It certainly has been a long time and the line still hasn't progressed yet, right?” (Iris) “Certainly.” (Tanya)

I went back to the employee area with Ryle.

# Chapter 83: The Later Talks of a Riot

[Iris' POV]

When I returned to the employee area, I was greeted by a pale-faced Mimosa... I felt very sorry for making her worry about me.

“... Misa, I'm so sorry for making you worry.” (Iris)

Even though we were the only ones in the employee area, I called her Misa because that was the pseudonym we agreed to use when we were in the city.

“Alice, I was worried about you. I now understand your escorts' feelings very well after watching you from over here. Well...” (Mimosa) Mimosa sighed heavily. She could not bear the worry any longer and shriveled up. I knew it wasn't possible for me to act placid and tranquil every time an incident happened, so I just stayed quiet and put a wry smile on my face.

We walked out of the store accompanied by Tanya.

“Well, I'm glad Lady Iris is safe and okay.” (Mimosa)

After walking a few more meters, Mimosa and I parted ways. Strangely enough, I did not really feel like touring the city anymore.

The next day, I noticed that I was strangely fatigued as I walked to my office as I usual.

Waiting for me was my desk with of course a large stack of documents waiting for me to look over. After looking at some of the papers for a while, I called up Tanya and had her bring in some tea so I could take a short break.

“... Tanya” (Iris)

“Yes.” (Tanya)

“I need a list of all of the problems that my excommunication has brought towards the company and in detail.” (Iris) “I finished the report yesterday, and I have already ordered and inspected everything to make sure they are accurate.” (Tanya) Tanya gave me a document filled with the

data she compiled yesterday. As expected of Tanya. She's such a diligent worker.

I flipped through the documents and looked through the data.

As a result of my excommunication, the total number of customers that were going to the Azura Conglomerate stores had decreased somewhat significantly.

All of the shops under the Azura Conglomerate, which I established, and all of the stores in the Armenia Territory had either been greatly or slightly affected.

It also gave the merchants in Armenia's Chamber of Commerce a very hard time as they were associated with me through trade deals and the bank that I had established.

Although that crisis had already been resolved, the aftereffects of the excommunication were still torturing me and feeding away at my resolve.

Although I shouldn't think of it this way, to be perfectly honest, the fact that the previous Pope and the Second Prince's Faction did a significant amount of damage to my company is undeniable.

Another reason the Conglomerate started to decline was because of the lack of human resources. As soon as I became excommunicated, many core employees had suddenly quit because they didn't want to be associated with a company that had an excommunicated person as the president. As a result, the majority of the stores run by the Azura Conglomerate were poorly maintained, which created a horrible impression on the local customers.

When I thought of this, my mind became very complicated as I needed to think of a solution to raise the reputation of the Azura Conglomerate fast.

As I thought about it more, I was suddenly hit by a fit of fatigue.

"... At that time, if Dean had not given me reliable connections with that priest and I was brought back into the church, the Azura Conglomerate may not even be a business today. ... No, the Conglomerate in the Armenia

Territories would still be maintained but outsourcing would be impossible.” (Iris) Tanya nodded at my remark. In fact, as a result of the turmoil, I gained a connection with the most influential priest in the current church, Priest Ralph.

“... There’s no doubt that if it weren’t for Priest Ralph, Lady Iris’ claim would have lacked backing and Lady Iris’ evidence would have been deemed false and tampered. Lady Iris understands that fact, right? It’s a bit scary to think that all of the business under the Territory of Armenia would likely have taken a huge hit and most of them would probably have even been bankrupt.” (Tanya) For Armenia, a territory that is very dependent on trade and economy, my excommunication would have destroyed its foundations and lost the citizens’ trust.

In fact, the president of the Chamber of Commerce stepped down from his position. I thought that it was perfectly understandable given the state of Armenia after my excommunication.

The problem is that now, most of the companies will not make their headquarters in Armenia and that will decrease the number of merchants passing through Armenia.

In other words, the 2nd Prince is trying to use the economy to destroy Armenia with a method that doesn’t involve the military.

That is my a speculation but I have no evidence backing that up.

In fact, now that I’ve gotten over the excommunication ordeal, the Azura Conglomerate can finally start releasing new products and reestablish its reputation and make customers gradually return to buy our products again.

“Our company’s business has gone down quite a bit because of the Second Prince.”

Hence the current problems.

However, it should also be known that the Second Prince’s company gained no momentum through the crisis.

Additionally, the quality and pricing are also similar between our

companies. However, due to the Second Prince Prince's taking advantage of the Azura Conglomerate's crisis, they have gained a small customer advantage over us.

I kept thinking back to how the false accusation led to a good majority of our customers not returning.

Because the management was poorly run for a short period of time, the customers had decreased in the long-term because they didn't trust our company anymore.

On the other hand, it is a bit relieving that the Church is backing up our Chamber of Commerce now.

"Well. I have to resolve the consequences of our employees becoming negligent with their responsibilities as well as resolve the case of our total number of customers decreasing. Judging from the contents of the employment contract, it seems that the Azura Conglomerate is still doing a much better job than the Second Prince's company. However, it seems many of our employees were dismissed because of the deterioration in management. Damme seemed like one of the people who was dismissed due to the poor management... It seems we have to cut down the number of employees quite a bit." (Iris) "Isn't that something to be dejected about?" (Tanya)

"No. I thought that it was a waste to let them be so easily dismissed too. However, I know that it is inevitable to lay off employees when the management deteriorates. As the president, I cannot make decisions based off of my feelings and although I do feel very sympathetic for the people that did get laid off, I cannot blame the management at the time for making that decision." (Iris) Also, it is undeniable that the Second Prince's company did gain many advantages because of the information that the ex-employees gathered during their time in the Azura Conglomerate.

I realized that I was drunk on my achievements and dismissed it easily without ever planning for this scenario back then.

"A trait of mankind is that the economic power and social status that one had built once is not easily discarded. In fact, the people who quit the

Azura Conglomerate said that the payment of the contracts in the past was high but it worsened and there were multiple complaints filed about the worsened management. Overall, it seems that the cores of the company management quit and the decisions were left up to less reliable people.” (Iris) Even during my excommunication, it seems like the Azura Conglomerate’s management was fine and running without any problems. I just complicated everything by my excommunication.

If things keep going the way it is right now, there will be a hurdle about employing new members of upper management.

“Is there any possibility that the previous workers of the Azura Conglomerate have any interest in working again for the Azura Conglomerate?” (Tanya) “I wouldn’t bet on that small chance.” (Iris)

“... So. We will need to strengthen our security as well so that an yesterday’s outrageous incident does not happen once again.” (Tanya) “Certainly.” (Iris)

# Chapter 84: Iris' Plan

[Iris' POV]

The correspondence that needed to be written by the president of the Azura Conglomerate was on hiatus until now because of the excommunication incident.

There was an overwhelming amount of correspondences to write for the damage taken at the riot and for the rush after the convergence.

All I had left to do was to respond to the letters we were receiving from another company. It looked like I was going to have to stay up writing correspondences.

I was slightly regretful that I will have to work a lot more than my usual routine. However, my office is a place to get work done. Not a place to cry over past mistakes.

I collapsed into the back of my chair, and I threw my ink quill onto my desk.

Recently, I've begun to take this posture more when I am tired.

"Hey, Sei..." (Iris)

He's probably here to collect the letters that I have written so far.

"Yes, what is it?" (Sei)

"This time, the Second Prince has approached three companies and ruined them. Do you think the Azura Conglomerate should acquire the three companies by purchasing them?" (Iris)

Sei looked very startled after I asked him the question. But after a moment, he had calmed down.

"... Why are you suddenly talking like this? Before this, haven't you heard that there is a shield behind the second prince. Doesn't the actions you're thinking about doing suggest retaliatory behavior? Are you sure you want to go against the Second Prince?" (Sei)

Correction. His calm gaze seems to be a facade disguising the deep

worry he possessed for me.

“I agree... but no. In my opinion, it’s more of showing mercy to the three companies if we buy them instead. As you can probably guess, the companies’ management is deteriorating and most of their employees are quitting. We happen to have a dire need of employees right now. Additionally, the Second Prince’s way of thinking is flawed. He thinks of companies as his tools. He removes companies when he thinks they are an eyesore to him.” (Iris)

His conduct is laughable.

After our disengagement, it feels like I’m able to really notice the Second Prince’s misdeeds at last... I did not notice at all when I fell in love with him.

“Lady Iris, you cannot deny that this situation would provoke the Second Prince’s wrath. Why are you trying to take the riskiest route?” (Sei)

“At the time of my excommunication, when the goods from the Armenian Territory went through the borders, the tariffs that were imposed were significantly higher than normal. I’m sure that the Second Prince had a hand in the reason why heavy tariffs were imposed on the Armelian Territory.” (Iris)

Although the uproar has subsided, the lost money for the companies has yet to be returned. Even if I try to negotiate with them, it would be a waste of time because they would refuse to give that money back.

Because the Second Prince’s faction is hostile towards me, my position as the Proxy Lord would do little to move their hand.

“In other words, when selling our goods to other territories, Armelian companies take a huge loss due to taxes.” (Iris)

“Well, If it is possible to acquire only the management part of the three companies, I believe it will be okay. But the whole companies themselves? That’s a little bit too much. don’t you think? It would be better if we could borrow the name of the company and move our workers there. For example, if we separate the Transport Department in the Azura



Conglomerate and merge it with one of the three businesses. Then, they would technically be independent, right?” (Sei)

“Indeed... That means that if you can use the name of that company that you’re buying, the tax won’t apply to the sub-company. If it goes well, things will gradually go back to the pre-excommunication incident and the other companies will benefit again. Well, I heard before that the company, Oodana, also hired escorts one by one and distributed it from cities to towns. You can cut costs by underwriting them one by one, so you should use the employees from other businesses as well. The point is that I want to develop the Azura Conglomerate as a business.” (Iris)

I put on a wry smile as I knew that my workload would increase substantially in the future.

Nevertheless, it is also a fact that we cannot ignore the corrupt nobles rounded up in the Second Prince’s Faction. It will be a pain negotiating with them.

Well, although it’s easy to expand the business, whether the Azura Conglomerate will profit from it is the question.

“... I will be taking the characteristics of each company into consideration to narrow down which companies that the Azura Conglomerate will purchase.” (Iris)

“Thank you.” (Sei)

# Chapter 85: Provision of information

Sei started taking actions immediately. The written report on all business contents and personnel of each firm related to buy-outs.

With that as base, he initiating to a certain company.

To not make it look like he is doing something publicly as much as possible, he kept taking measures in the dark and moreover, worsened the administration state.

He is doing exactly what a villain would do... feeling such bittersweet feelings, he kept issuing instructions indifferently.

Even still, we can't really back away either, now when the tariff hasn't normalized yet.

Tariff... that reminds me...

"...I wonder why Ed-sama's party is taking more tariff from us..."

Silently murmured the question I had wondered quite a few times.

"Isn't it just to purely pester you?"

To that, Tanya who was standing beside responded.

"No... The possibility of that is pretty high, I know. But as a country, when you think that you would have more demerits than merits, I can't help feel that is not all there is to it..."

And in reality, Armelia's territory did have rich soils and had a standing of 2 or 3 in production of crops even among countries.

But because of this turmoil, the export will definitely decrease. In other words, that would mean that the influx to other territories would decrease.

They wouldn't profit much even if they were to export to other territories... On the other hand, population in our territory is just increasing, and to prepare for a disaster... also for the times when crop yields are low due to bad weather, we need to stockpile resources in our territory to a certain extent instead of exporting outside. That way it would be more profitable.

“Well, either way, we are low on ingredients now. And so, Tanya. Investigate into the movements of the nobles in the capital and report to me in detail. Also the price trends and reactions of the town as well... Well, for today, that’s it.”

Signing the last document, she handed it over to Tanya.

At that moment, a knock was heard and Sei entered the room.

The timing was too good that she couldn’t help but think that he was able to see what was going on inside.

“Miss. That company agreed to come to the negotiation table.”

That company... the one I have been diligently cornering recently, eh?

“About time. When?”

“The other party desires it to be the day after tomorrow.”

“Is that so... Alright. Confirm it with them. Tanya, please adjust my schedule for the day after tomorrow.”

Lowering their heads to me, they both headed for the library.

Letting out a sigh as if to let go of my fatigue, I sat down on the chair.

Things seem to have settled down a bit so I guess I will walk around the mansion a bit. Always being in the same posture during work really puts its strain on my joints.

Thinking that, I decided to take a walk and stood up.

I guess I will go read a book while drinking tea at the courtyard. While I was walking towards the courtyard, wondering such things, I met with Bern.

“Oh, Bern...”

“Sister, what are you doing?”

“I was done with today’s quota so thought of taking a break.”

“...Then, can I have a bit of your time?”

I couldn’t help but make a bitter smile hearing him.

“Is it fine if we go talk at the courtyard, then?”

Hearing my suggestion, Bern too gave a bitter smile.

“I see. Then let’s go to the library.”

I guess I will have my tea there. Tanya should probably be sending someone in place of her by now as well.

And then, I ended up going back to the room with Bern after all.

“So, what happened?”

“I am not sure if I should call it a discussion or a report but...”

Hearing his inarticulate manner of speaking, I thought it would be something not good and so prepared myself for the worst.

“...The other day, the proposal to disassemble the army was raised to the King.”

The words he spoke were so unexpected that I couldn’t help but be stunned.

I am surely making an idiotic expression, unlike that of a noble’s daughter.

“...Do-don’t tell me... that thing Yuri Noir, the baron’s daughter, was talking about long ago? To think it would actually be reported to the King...”

Having finished saying that, I gave out a sigh. And at the same time, I trembled with fear. Because her words have that influence to make that a reality.

“Since it was reported to the emperor, she got approval from several nobles, right?”

“Yes. It seems like the thing had progressed quite a bit when father wasn’t able to move due to your excommunication uproar.”

So that means I am responsible for it as well...

“However, due to the swift resolution of your incident, Father fought them together with Grandfather... Marquis Anderson also joined with the

opposing party and the proposal was stopped at the critical moment.”

“That means, the dissembling of the army was rejected. How?”

“I heard they brought up the warring regime law.”

“...Warring regime law...?”

I feel like I have seen it somewhere... But hearing the unaccustomed word, I was puzzled and searched through the knowledge in my head for an answer.

And suddenly remembered that I had seen it long ago at the principal residence.

“Ahh, that old law, eh...”

If I am not wrong, it was created when the countries were established. And just according to that name, it will be given the most priority during war times.

The last time it was used was more than hundred years ago.

If I remember correct, it was used during the foundation of the country, when the autonomy of each territory was much stronger than now.

At that time, the country didn't have a permanent army and each of the feudal lords had to bundle soldiers together with the ruler of the country, the royalty.

At that time, one lord refused to dispatch troops as he was opposed to war but was forced with that law.

And with that, the permanent army was built... Even still, the feudal lords now have possession of a minimum soldiers, in the name of guards.

Let's return to the main topic.

During these hundred years, the reason that law wasn't used was simply because it wasn't needed.

Now when the country has an army, basically, during a war, no matter what each of the nobles are thinking, they unify in front of the enemy and fight as a country.

In other words, the fact that that law had to be brought out and used once again itself just goes to show that the country is already starting to wear out.

“...They just stopped fighting for some time and it’s not a truce. So, we’re still in warring periods and the law would apply, eh...”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Father has sure gone through some troubles as well, huh? But I am glad we were able to avoid the worst case scenario.”

Seriously. Just as father had said, this is not a truce.

Also... after having researched that baron’s daughter’s personal history, I think that country is doing quite a lot behind the scenes...

Although I say that, I will abide by father’s sayings and do not intend on being too assertive in intervening as I am just one feudal lord.

“Yes... And so...”

“There is still something more?”

“No, the real talk is from here... Father has given me homework regarding this incident.”

“Homework?”

“Yes. In this incident, what was the biggest problem? Father told me to think about that.”

“What was... the biggest problem, eh? And?”

“No... just that, I thought it would be nice if you were to give me some kind of a hint upon reporting...”

“Father told you to report to me?”

“Yes.”

I thought about it for a moment. If my thinking is right... then probably, father didn’t pass this as the prime minister to his daughter, but rather as the Armelia Duke family’s head to Armelia territory’s feudal lord substitute, me.

In other words, to prepare.

“...Hey, Bern. By the way, who were the nobles who agreed to this proposal?”

“Other than the second prince’s party, the neutral party also agreed. I think the neutral party being swayed over to the second prince’s party is the problem but....”

“He said you were wrong, didn’t he?”

“Yes.”

After that, I heard about the concrete details of the people who declared their approval to this.

Ah.. this country is declining...

“By the way, were the suggestions also submitted for the military personnel if that proposal were to be accepted?”

“Yes. It would depend on their will but, during the peaceful times, it was said that they could serve under the feudal lords. And in the case of an emergency, they could be recruited under the country’s name. In other words, it would mean that the feudal lords would get the current military funds.”

‘Ahh, as I thought...’ I couldn’t help but mix a sigh with it.

“...Bern. I don’t know if my thinking is correct or not. There is probably no definite answer and father probably wants to see how deeply you think and how far you see into the future about this.”

During work, I always think. That how easy it would’ve been if there were proper answers for everything like in the school tests.

“I see.”

“The fact that the neutral party and the second prince’s party are inclining towards each other... I see, I do agree with that. But is that all?”

“What do you mean, that all?”

“I mean you should look at things from every possible angle. What were

the thoughts of the neutral party about agreeing to this, and how far would you be able to see judging from that. I am telling you to think of all that. There are no definite right and wrongs so the more you think, the more you'll be able to deal with different situations."

Bern wore an expression like he was pondering on what I had just said and after a while, he nodded.

"Thank you very much, sister."

"No, thank you, too, for the report."

Wearing a much more refreshed expression than the one with which he entered, Bern left the room.



# Chapter 86: Dida's Query (1)

After Berne left, Tanya walked inside the office with Ryle and Dida.

Wonderful, perfect timing.

"I deeply apologize for asking you to do something for me right after you came back.... Tanya, please bring me the fief's inventory report. Ryle, Dida, find out the number of personnel on our guards list, as well as the Armelia Ducal House's private army. Also, report the number of available commanders and captains."

"I understand."

"I'll go immediately, but milady, what's going on?"

Tanya quickly bowed her head in confirmation, and Ryle and Dida also accepted my request. But Ryle seemed to have questions about my commands.

Well, anyone would be confused about these instructions.

"Just now, Father sent me a message through Berne: The bill for the army's disassembly has been submitted to the throne."

"What...."

Their faces were filled with surprise. Not only did their emotions include a part of the Armelia Ducal House, but also as Grandfather-the General's disciples, and worry about his mental state.

"Thankfully, the proposal was stopped by Grandfather-sama and Father-sama."

The three of them sighed in relief.

"The problem is behind the scenes-the aristocrats who were in favor of the proposal and bill."

"What does that mean?"

"Well, first things first. All of what I'm about to say is guesswork, so there will be some errors."

They nodded as I spoke.

“First, is the flow of matters. This incident was started by the words of Yuri Noir, the daughter of Baron Noir.”

“... That woman?”

Ryle didn't conceal his displeasure at all. Seeing him express his emotions so freely, especially on such a negative topic, was a rare sight.

“Although I don't know how, I have a hunch that she has ties with the country of Towair, judging from Tanya's reports.”

As for how close was their connection, and the methods of communication, it was too early to make any statements. Or maybe.... She was threatened by someone, or unconsciously used as a tool. Of course, the possibility of her being a treasonous spy existed.

But these are all murky facts, and I didn't have any evidence of their communication. However, I was still going to estimate with the worst possible situation.

“Father, who is the only person I truly rely on, is being rooted to the ground whenever something happens to me. To have the army disassembled.... That marks the start of Towair Kingdom's dream plan. That attack by the Church of Darryl was stun Father, and Yuri-sama.... May be the person behind all of this.”

Now, everything's falling into place. The pope made those iron-set actions against me to drive me out, probably to redeem some agreed rewards.

The three of them smacked their lips in unhappiness after hearing my words.

“This next issue is the start of the problem. The aristocrats.... Who proposed this plan.”

“Well, no doubt it's the Second Prince's faction?”

Ryle gave me the answer I was expecting.

“Not only them. Actually, there was assent from the neutral party, too.”

“Even the neutral party....”

Ryle repeated in bewilderment. Tanya and Dida also had sour looks on their faces.

“Then, what’s in it for them?”

“... I think it’s because they wanted to legally expand their own militaries.”

“What’s the matter with that?”

“Ryle, Dida, you two know that our fief’s army maintenance is put at the least priority.... From the fief’s size, the volume of our military is pretty straightforward.

This was a part of the remnant left of the past Duke. Back then, he had much more power than we had right now.

Opposition to our military’s organization and the requirement of “national army assembly” resulted in the limbo our forces were at right now.

“And since every Duke monitors each other closely, along with the kingdom’s surveillance, no fief would have too much military power.”

This prevented rebellion and independence from dukedoms.

“The plan that proposed the disassembly of the kingdom’s military wanted to distribute the army into select fiefs, and the costs would be handled by the fief privately. If it were an emergency situation, to distribute military power to states... wouldn’t be the worst idea, but it would return the kingdom to when fiefs held the most power. That is what a great number of neutral-party aristocrats seek.”

“To maintain their own military strength just in case something happens... Well, isn’t that just the same as abandoning your kingdom?”

Dida blurted out when I was organizing my thoughts.

“Exactly. But we don’t know whether their plan is to actively rebel and break away, or hole up in their fief’s shell.”

“Then, to make inventory of our own military... Milady, do you wish to fight these cowards if the time comes? Do you wish to become the kingdom’s shield and sword, and walk in battle by their side?”

“Well, not really. It’s just a precaution-since the situation is really unstable right now, if something really happens, we will need to defend our fief.”

“Mmm... But....”

Dida’s tone wavered just like they always did, but they carried a very serious attitude.

Why...?

Usually, Ryle would scold him, but he hasn’t said a word. He’s probably still recovering from the news.

“Then, if something really happens, will the one that commands the fief’s army be you, milady?”

“.... Yes.”

Scarily, that is not impossible. But.

It’s only because Father is still running politics in the royal capital.

If I wasn’t here as the Feudal Lord Representative, decisions would take very long to process. For such important matters like these, Father would probably have to command from the capital. Even if Sebastian were to manage the fief indefinitely, he wouldn’t be given that kind of responsibility and power.

But, as long as I’m here, that situation wouldn’t happen. Because I have the same authority as the Duke himself.

## Chapter 87: Dida's Query (2)

"Milady, are you really ready to take that responsibility?"

Dida stowed away his wavering tone, and looked at me with full focus.

"If this really evolves to war, defeating the enemy would be absolutely necessary. There will be casualties on our side, too. With a single command that you make, milady, everyone will be under that situation."

"... Dida."

Ryle inched closer, and called Dida's name in a scolding tone.

"Princess, are you capable of issuing a command that will result in the deaths of our enemies, even at the expense of our own militaries?"

"Dida!!"

When he didn't stop talking, Ryle shouted his name again.

The room's silence was deafening.

"If war really will come upon us, everyone will have to take that burden—the burden of possibly losing their own lives, of having their hands dirtied in the enemy's blood. So the princess will not have to take this responsibility alone."

Ryle's voice echoed throughout the voiceless room.

"Of course, I'm ready to take this on, but princess, are you really ready to take accountability? The decisions of our princess will determine the balance of our victories and losses. Even though you would not be directly commanding the troops, the princess' intentions will be our guidepost. Our backs will be laden with not only our own lives, but the citizens' as well. But, the princess will have to account for everyone on the battlefield, as well as the repercussions for after the war.... Is that right?"

Ryle remained silent after Dida's question.

"Furthermore, even though it's not direct, signing the authorization papers will still count as spilling enemy blood."

Dida was right.... My heart felt pierced by the truth's starkness.

I can't just play dumb when I know the answer.

.... Such as the wishes of the people.

I have accomplished many deeds with single, decisive actions.

Even the citizens, who definitely won't approve of the war, will be caught in the storm.

.... When war truly breaks out, will I really be able to send our military into combat?

".... I won't ask for the lightning-quick decisions that milady always makes. But, since our princess has already taken the future into consideration and started to prepare, maybe those fast resolutions will be for the best."

Even I don't have the answer when I ask myself these kinds of questions.

"Yes... It's exactly as you said, Dida."

My tone was pretty much worthless.

But, it couldn't be helped.

I, really am worthless.

I told Dida and Ryle to make arrangements for the future, but I wasn't even prepared myself.

"Right now, I still don't have an answer, to your question. Please give me, a little more time."

"Understood. We'll go make the preparations now."

I thought that he wouldn't start to immediately take action after my answer's delay. I was surprised that Dida announced first what they were going to do.

".... Yes, I'll leave it to you."

# Chapter 88: A Storm of Thoughts

When Dida and Ryle left, I returned to my daily tasks; however, my mind was filled with the conversation.

“... Ah.”

I misspelled a word on the elegant document I was writing on.

Meaningless words floated in my head-the word “carelessness” fully describes my state right now.

I put down my pen, and stretched out myself. From head to toe, my body made “creak, creak” sounds, noises that shouldn’t come from a young girl.

Those very words in my brain are all from that discussion.

.... Ever since becoming the Feudal Lord Representative, I’ve felt numerous times that some problems simply don’t have valid solutions.

But I never thought that I would run into this obstacle again.

However, the issue is all only just a big “if” .... Forgetting about something that would only probably happen isn’t hard.

I only have to lie to myself, saying that decisions can wait until the kick finally lands.

But, if I were to do that... Dida wouldn’t accept it. And all the deceptive crap will all be scraped away anyway when the time comes.

When it comes to that.... I fear that I won’t even be able to distort my own thoughts. I can already imagine the frenzied, useless state that I’ll be in.

Plenty of times, including now, people’s fates.... Have been in my hands.

People end up dead under a powerless lord.

.... But this time, the situation’s severity is on a whole other level.

I have to take responsibility, responsibility of the people’s destinies.

I’ll be held liable for human lives, nothing I’ve ever experienced is at this level.

.... Forget about the “previous life”, even “I” in this current life have never taken such an accountability.

\*TL note: Iris is saying that even though she’s been sort of “in charge” of people’s fates (financially and culturally), she’s never really been responsible for human lives so directly. Of course, she’s talking about the possible upcoming war.

Reincarnation in a world where nobody is harmed would be the best.

Then, no matter who, anyone will receive kindness and generosity.

Nobody will have to feel any pain, just as fairy tales describe. Darkness will be smothered up like a big candy wrapper.

No, if this were still a game.... Iris will probably take on all of the filthiness as the antagonist. But honestly, worlds where everyone is treated affectionately don’t exist.

No matter what, this world is still real.

If not, I wouldn’t be able to see people this clearly into their hearts.

All kinds of thoughts and ideals swirl around like a storm. Aristocrats steal people’s rights and power with dark, ugly faces.

Children’s fables will definitely not mention the abyss between the filthy rich and the impoverished poor.

Each of these thoughts made me come up with more.

All of these ideas were the reason why I was so stressed out.

... I should ask Tanya to bring something to drink, I can’t work like this.

I stopped my inner monologue, and was just about to call her name....

“.... Ah, kya~....”

The little tower of documents fell over. Countless papers fluttered in the air.

Oh, no.

The files that I had so laboriously organized were in a mess. I thought



about how long and difficult it would be to rearrange them, and was finally fed up.

“... Tanya.”

“Yes, I’m here.”

“Apologies, but I’m going to the salon. Please pass the message to others, and prepare tea. Also, will you please reorganize these files for me?”

“Yes, I understand.”

I threw all of my work aside, and finally took a break.

# Chapter 89: Okaa-sama's Past

\*Okaa-sama means "Mother". This chapter is a dialogue between Iris and Mellice Armelia.

Oto-sama means "Father". That is Louis Armelia. Also, this chapter heavily references to the prequel of this novel, "Common Sense of a Warrior".

I sipped my tea elegantly in the salon.

Normally, I would gaze at the decorative flowers, and calm my mind at their beauty.... But today, I couldn't stay composed.

"Fuahh..."

"Ah, Iris-chan, what happened? What's with the long face?"

Mother appeared with her luminous and gentle voice.

"Okaa-sama...."

"You, over there, I want the same drink as Iris-chan."

Mother sat down next to me after instructing the servant.

"Taking a break?"

"..... Mm, I'm just a little tired."

"You can't bet your life on your work. Ugh, you're just like your father."

Okaa-sama's "fufufu" chuckling was beautiful, as always.

Even the lifting of her teacup to her lips was charming. Even though she was my mother, I felt taken aback.

"Really, only because you're tired? Do you have anything else on your mind?"

Hearing Mother's words, I tensed up in surprise.

Is someone like me really that readable?

".... Iris-chan, do you want to take a walk outside? If you're shut indoors all day, your thoughts will focus on all the bad things."

As she spoke, Mother snatched my hand, pulled me up, and started walking.

“Eh? Eh?”

Although she had a slender appearance, Mother was unexpectedly strong. She dragged me along her steps.

I looked back, and the servants seemed confused and frantic. They didn't know how to respond to her actions.

..... So I was dragged on for a few more minutes.

Somehow, I got on a horse cart, and we wobbled forward for ten or so minutes.

We climbed up a long, daunting set of cobblestone stairs.

Finally, I stood on top of a high tower overlooking the Royal City.

“.... So pretty....”

I sighed in appreciation of the view.

We were close to the floating clouds, and warm sunlight enveloped my body.

Under the sun's brilliance, the Royal City looked even more alluring than usual.

“Mm, indeed, Iris-chan.”

“Okaa-sama, this is....”

“This place, is the watchtower for the Royal City Guard. Right now, it should be under the army's custody.”

“..... We were actually allowed in?”

Simply put, this was the military's property. Even as aristocrats, I was surprised that we could enter even as citizens.

“With your grandfather's name, it was easy.”

For Mother to talk about things like this so carelessly was really something to be respected about her.

“... When I was a child, I would come here if something happened to me. So I’m naturally familiar with the guards.”

Mother smiled gently.

“... Okaa-sama, what would bother you back then?”

“Hehehe.... Like, when I got into an argument with my father, or when I lost in combat against him.”

Mother looked very cheerful as she spoke.

“Also, I would come here when one of my dreams fell apart.”

“Okaa-sama’s, dreams? ..... Okaa-sama, what kind....”

Mother’s dreams... I couldn’t imagine at all.

This person, dubbed the “Flower of Society”, is praised with honor and awe nationwide.

I felt that no matter what she wanted, she would definitely get it.

I couldn’t imagine a single dream that Mother would have given up.

“Back then, I wanted to serve in the military.”

My pupils dilated as I heard the startling answer.

“... In the military?”

“Mm.... I trained in combat from a young age. That was because my mother’s life was taken away by bandits.”

As I listened to this completely unknown story, I was taken back again.

“My father’s grief back then was really something. The person who won many victories, and maintained the security of his kingdom.... He would have never thought that he would be powerless to protect his wife, and even less that her life was taken by the citizens he protected.”

My chest hurts.

A glorious warrior.... The savior on the battlefield.

My praised and respected grandfather, wasn’t able to shield my grandmother from harm....

And, she was killed by a citizen of this kingdom....

“So after my mother passed away.... I started to study combat. My father didn’t stop me. I didn’t learn manners and everything the other aristocrat girls learned, but was just like any meat-headed boy.”

I didn’t know how to respond to this new knowledge.

This conversation with my mother has really shocked me today.

Because, this was the Okaa-sama?

To think that the mother who is labeled as the textbook aristocratic wife, never learned etiquette or courtesies when she was young.

“... Was it because of my father’s teachings, or because I indeed did have innate talent, as my father claimed? Forget about the other kids at my age, I never even lost to the adults older than my father. In my memory, he was the only one I lost to.”

Mother smiled as she talked, but my mouth didn’t curve the slightest.

“... I didn’t know when, but I decided to become a soldier, and protect the country just as my father did.”

“... However, the people who took Grandmother’s life were still this nation’s citizens. Why would....”

“Indeed.... Just as you said, I hated the bandits who murdered my mother, and didn’t understand why my father would still keep protecting the country even after her death. Hatred, or just the desire to learn to protect myself? To be honest, I don’t even know the reason why I trained in combat to this day.”

A shadow fell behind my mother’s smile.

Under the sunlight, I somehow felt that Mother’s grin was fraudulent.

“So, that’s probably why I became like this.... When Father finally caught the bandits who were involved in that murder case, for a period of time, my heart felt extremely empty. Why was I studying in combat? I lost my ambition.... At that time, I came here a lot to brood. Why did I seek this knowledge of battle? I ruminated, and then some more.... Thanks to the

dazzling panorama right here, I cleaned up my emotions.”

“See....” Mother pointed to the amazing sight.

There were seas of people, as well as beautiful streets and avenues.

“In each of these buildings, there are individual people.... Because they’re “living”, they laugh, cry, and have their own everyday lives. I thought.... What beauty this is, how precious this is!”

“Okaa-sama....”

“Yes, there are those who become bandits and the like, but there are also many helpless citizens. To prevent something like my family’s tragedy to fall upon someone else, to prevent people from weeping in sorrow, to preserve the spectacle in front of us right now, I would want to protect all of this even if it were to soak my hands in fresh blood.”

An abrupt jolt of understanding streaked through my heart.

“.... Then, you’ve kept that mindset ever since childhood...?”

“Maybe it was because I lost my important mother, and didn’t want to lose anybody else, that I had such a determined resolution.”

“Okaa-sama....”

“But, reality is cruel. As for why, it’s because the military restricts women from recruitment. A man who lost to me in a duel reminded me of that, and I crashed into that iron wall. My dreams shattered to bits.”

Those men were really.... Cowardly. I knew that it was all in the past, but I still felt a twinge of fury.

If I feel this way only as a third-party, how did my mother feel back then?

“Haven’t you thought of becoming a knight?”

The knight’s position was open to some women.

That was so female members of the royal family would be protected.

“I didn’t study combat to protect the royal family. And, to put bluntly, female knights are only a decoration.”

It was true. I nodded.

Female knights didn't require a lot of skill. They were kept far away from battle, since if a woman were to appear on the front line, she would immediately be targeted as a weakness.

"... And at that time, I came here again. But I was really hopeless at that time, since my newfound goal faded to mist once again."

Her desire of revenge had disappeared, and her dream had died.

... After listening to Mother's past, I amended my thoughts about her indomitability.

"Then, I met your old man here."

"Oto-sama...."

"Mm. Back then, his father was still the Prime Minister. He found this place also, and started coming regularly."

... I suddenly thought, is this tower's security really alright?

Well, as long as there's nobody unfamiliar.... Right?

"I was crying right next to him, but your old man didn't take notice of me, he just kept staring at the view. It's embarrassing to think of it now, but I opened a can of whoop-ass on him since he was intruding the only place I liked to be at." \*

\*I know it's unprofessional, but "opening a can of whoop-ass" sounds cooler.

Mother started to blush, still flustered by her first meeting with my father.

"But, your old man educated me."

"Edu....cated?"

"Yep. 'If you're going to give up now, that means your dream only amounted to this much, after all.'"

To throw such rock-solid words upon a crying lady did sound like Oto-sama's style.

And for Okaa-sama to talk about that memory so cheerfully, was her living up to her reputation.

“He asked me: ‘Why, did you train yourself in the art of combat? To gain honor within the army? Or to protect citizens? If it’s because the first one, then cry all you want. But if it’s the latter, then is there really a reason to bawl?’ He said to me.”

“.... If it’s the latter, then is there really a reason to bawl?”

“Yes, indeed. Your old man probably meant to say, ‘You’ve been treating your methods and goals as the same.’”

So that’s how it is, I understand now.

“Your old man told me this, “If protecting is your goal, then you’ve only lost one method, there are many more than you could possibly count that can hold up the people’s lives. I myself do not wish to achieve that through warfare, but rather politics.... But even though I say that, I still have some ways to go to get to my father’s level.’ I felt a huge shock after hearing those words.... And I felt reborn. After that, I started dating your father, and gained a great amount of respect for him. I fell into the river of love alongside your father, and eventually married.... Then, I walked into another battlefield.”

“Another battlefield?”

“Yes, indeed. Sociality is a completely different arena.”

As she spoke, Mother smiled lightly, and looked very proud.... Her figure was absolutely stunning.

Then, I started to laugh.

It’s an arena, indeed.

“.... Okaa-sama, I’m very grateful to you for bringing me here today. Can I.... stay here for a while longer?”

“Mm, of course.”



# Chapter 90: Resolve

When I came home, I really wanted to just sleep till the next morning, so I crawled under my covers after my bedtime routine.

But my mind was strangely alert, and I didn't feel a wink of tiredness.

.... My thoughts reeled the conversation with Mother and the view of the tower.

".... To prevent sadness from further tragedy, to preserve the spectacle before us."

My mother's face was extremely beautiful as she said that.

It wasn't really because of her natural looks, but more like.... I saw an affectionate mother who loved everything around her.

I looked back upon myself, what were my feelings towards my people's emotions....? As I pondered this, I laughed unwittingly.

Am I not the same as my mother?

When I met Miss Mina and the children at the orphanage.... Or, even earlier than that. I had already steeled my decision when I was touring the fief.

At that time, I wasn't involved in politics yet, but I had power. A power called the "Authority as the Feudal Lord Representative".

My path forward, as well as my responsibilities, is deeply connected with the people's lives.

That includes the piles of papers sitting on my desk. When I scrutinize each file, I always can feel the pressuring burden on my shoulders.

It's all to protect the citizens' way of life.

Haven't I had that resolve since a long time ago?

It could be because.... After the excommunication, that courage had weakened.

Isn't my existence absolutely beneficial to the fief's governance? If that's

true, then all of what I did and all of my progress has brought the fief forward, right?

.... It's always been fact that there is never a time to lose faith.

Because I'm already moving full steam ahead, my direction has pulled the citizens' lives and the fief in with it.

After all of what happened in the past, I couldn't still say "I haven't made a resolve yet."

I'm striding onward to fulfill my own dream.

I won't lose my objective. If I get lost in my way, then the people behind me would fall apart, too.

I should only do what I can in the best way possible.

As I thought about all of this, my feelings of displeasure and worry melted away, and my mind stabilized.

With a satisfying thought, I plunged myself into the world of dreams.

The next day, I called Ryle and Dida back.

"What do you need, Princess?"

"Mm, I just want to let you two know my resolve."

After hearing my words, Ryle widened his eyes in surprise. Dida started to smile in amusement.

".... Yesterday, Dida asked me if I was sure of my resolve."

"Indeed."

"Although my stance was wavering a bit.... After thinking about it, I figured it shouldn't have taken until yesterday to ask this question."

Dida's jaw dropped from my response.

\*TL note: In my opinion, author is being a little filler-y and melodramatic. Urrghh just get with the story "Because, I've already decided in my heart long ago-I want to protect this fief, and shield the residents of this land."

“.... To achieve that, will blood be spilled?”

“My answer is ‘yes’.... But also ‘no’.”

Ryle and Dida tilted their heads in confusion.

“My shoulders have carried the burden of hundreds of civilians’ lives since long ago. My mission is to protect this fief... And the lives inside it. If violence falls into the path of that goal, I will order our soldiers to action. Then, I will assume all related responsibilities.”

Worlds without pain do not exist.

I’ve understood this long before anything.

“However, to prevent such a travesty from happening.... I will resist the hardest I can, until the last second. I’ll seize every opportunity to prevent things from flowing in those terrible directions. Compared to agonizing over how to win wars, figuring out how to prevent them is far more superior. This is the most important priority, and I will follow this plan.”

Have I switched the positions of goals and methods?

That is indeed a mistake I’m making.

I’ve always been thinking-if war breaks out, who is going to assume responsibility? What will be the Duke’s position on the whole matter?

But, that isn’t what it should come down to. Because there is more than one method to achieve our goal.

Predicting future events, and utilizing both intelligence and counterintelligence. My pen, mind, and words will be my weapons.

Military force will be my last card. But before playing that hand, I must learn to use all of my deck to its fullest potentials.

This is my true mission.

“But.... If, no matter what.... Force will be the only path to walk on, I will have to rely on Dida, Ryle, you guys. Even a drop of blood spared will be worth it. But I’m the only one who can shoulder responsibility, so that will be covered by me.”

After I finished speaking, Dida started to laugh for some reason.

.... Did I say anything out of place?

No, that was all in a very serious tone....

“A very elegant resolve... But also an incredibly naïve one.”

“Dida....!”

Standing next to him, Ryle looked very angry.

“But, alright. The reason why we’re willing to serve the princess is precisely because of what kind of person you’ve always been. The princess can go protect the things she cares about.”

.... Then, is that approval?

“.... Just spit it out already.”

Ryle spoke exasperatedly.

“Missus, we are your shield and sword. The wrinkles of your worries will be smoothed out by us. Whenever you feel that force will be the only path to take.... Please rely on us. We will defend you with all our might.”

Ryle kneeled on one foot.

Dida also kneeled.

“Mm, thank you.... Ryle, Dida.”

I don’t want to lose them either.... They too are what I wish to safeguard.

Then I’ll keep fighting, for my fief.

# Chapter 91: The Man's Anger

"If this is all you have, you can't even afford a single time! Penniless peasants need to get out of my shop!"

With a furious voice, he was driven out of the store.

He frantically tried to walk back in, but the door was firmly shut, without any sign of opening again.

"... Shit!"

He started cursing in anger.

Although it was daytime, this small street was quite dark.... No, the avenue was actually brightly lit by sunlight. But the passerby's eyes were lifeless, expelling a depressing, glum atmosphere.

In the past, this area was a commonplace for people who weren't wealthy, but also weren't dirt-poor.

It was a pleasant convenience full of laughter-even though that was a bit of an exaggeration, at least the people weren't as spiritless as they were right now.

When did it become like this? It dropped like a rock from a cliff, tumbling down, down, down.

Since when did he start seeing such shadows and darkness?

This kingdom, is slowly rotting.

With the decrease of wages, the tax rate hadn't changed a bit.

The average goods consumption of families will fall, resulting in lower budgets for guilds. Unable to sell off their inventory, businesses will produce less stock. This chain of reactions will echo in an unstoppable wave.

Even though economic relief and damage control for citizens have become common, they were no more than facades by the upper-class.

If they really wished to help the lower and middle classes with good

heart, they should give us jobs, and money. Although everyone needed food and sustenance, if we kept relying on their short-term solutions, what will happen when they stopped providing relief? Furthermore, people need more than just food.

So foolish, the man laughed bitterly.

Even if one were to not work, there will be people that provide food, isn't this not a bad idea....

With such easy lives, this kingdom is so considerate of its people.

But I believe.... This is no different from being kept as livestock by the people above, and I can't just accept that.

Has nobody realized the unstable situation? Or is everyone just pretending they're blind?

It's rotting slowly.

No matter what, people will ultimately become fed-up with the higher-up's decisions and actions.

The people are always the ones that pay the price for upper-class' mistakes.

To put simply, I don't have any money. Without money, I can't buy medicine. With these circumstances, no matter how much food I receive, it wouldn't help at all.

"You, over there."

A voice sounded abruptly nearby.

I looked in the direction of its owner. A cloaked figure stood in my way.

Although I couldn't see her face clearly through the hood, I could determine that the person was a woman.

"Yes, you."

What does this finely-dressed woman want to do with him?

"Your name is...."

The name that she spoke was indeed mine. Why does she know my name?

“Is that right?”

“... Yes, it is. What do you want with me?”

“Hm, well, do you feel remorseful?”

“... Ha?”

“Everything you had was taken away, and you’re even driven to this pitiful state.... No, not everything. What you should protect, still remains by your side.”

His mind quickly cooled, and he immediately made distance between them.

“It should be fine if I’m not this cautious, right? It’s just a woman, after all.”

“To not be fooled by appearances.... I understand that fact so clearly that it’s become annoying. Unfortunately, I don’t trust anyone anymore. Especially people like you, who pop out of nowhere.”

“Indeed. If you haven’t learned your lesson after being betrayed, then you’re really an idiot.”

His face soured from the woman’s words.

“Although I don’t know how or where you found that out, I’m not interested in what you want.”

“But I need something from you.”

“Then find someone else.”

I turned my back towards her. Although I’ll be angrier passing that closed shop door one more time, it’s better than speaking with this woman.”

“Alright, I’ll cut the crap. Do you not want to reclaim everything you lost?”

“... Not interested.”

“Really? I believe that if you do, your brother might be in a better situation than he is in right now.”

With that sentence, he stopped in his tracks.

“... What do you want from me?”

“Everything. Your name.... Existence, and all that rests behind.”

“Do you want me to wag my tail and beg like a dog?”

“I don’t need pets. What I want you to do is become my hand and foot, and work for me.”

“Ha.... What specifically are you asking me to do?”

“I’m not planning for you to do anything weird, you know. I just want to help you take back what you lost. It’s shameless work that will help you get back to your previous position, and nothing more.”

“How could I just believe something like that? Such innocent ordeals don’t exist.”

“... That man is standing in my way, too.”

Compared to the sweet, soft tone she spoke with before, her voice sounded icily crystalline.

“He flies around, like a gnat. He sticks his hands in the path of my conglomerate, and that buzzing sound has been around my ears nonstop. It really can rub people in the wrong way. So, I too wish for that man to get out of our sights.”

With a whoosh, she peeled away her cloak. Her long, silver hair glittered under the sunlight.

He had never seen such a beautiful lady before.

“... My name, is Iris. I’m the head of the Azuta Conglomerate.”

Listening to her words, the questions in my head grew bigger and bigger.

Say, isn’t the Azuta Conglomerate one of the biggest businesses in the Royal City?



And the head of that group... Is a young woman?

“No matter if you believe me or not, the gears have already started to turn. Even without you, it won’t affect things that much.... But, if you would work under me, it’ll really make things easier. I don’t want to increase my workload.”

With those words, she smiled bitterly. That harmless grin almost made my heart stop.

But, it wasn’t finished yet.

“So, this is an exchange. You will.... Properly use my name, and my power. I will also use your name, and your power.... How do you want to do this? For me, I’m perfectly fine with running with my tail between my legs.”

With my response, she smiled in a different fashion than before.

Her expression seemed to say: If you run away now, then you’ve lost.... Do you want to be defeated like this? Indeed, my indignant emotions sparked to life in my heart.

“.... I, will not do any work that I disagree with.”

“Then, that’s enough. We have a deal.... Come with me.”

# Chapter 92: A Man's Troubles

Although I kept my guard, I still followed the woman's steps.

"... Tanya."

Suddenly, she called a name into the empty air in front of her.

There's no one....? Just as that thought appeared in my head, another woman seemingly materialized to her side.

"You called, missus?"

"Mm, please arrange for a doctor immediately."

"That's already been done. We are waiting for missus' orders."

"Ah, atta girl, Tanya.... Then, what do you want to do?"

The conversation was suddenly thrown at me. My only response was confusion.

"What I want to do, that means...."

"We've already made preparations, so the doctor may go to your little brother promptly. Now, you have two choices-either trust me and have Tanya bring the doctor to your brother's side right now, or first come to my estate?"

My heart throbbed with a moment's notice. To be honest, I didn't want anything more than to have the doctor treat my brother.

.... But.

"... Let's go to your estate first."

I picked the latter. Hearing my reply, the woman named Iris narrowed her eyes.

"Well, why is that?"

"I told you, I'm not naive enough to trust someone who popped out of nowhere. I'll go to where you live, and properly discuss what you said. I'm not just going to give up my brother so easily."

After I stated my thoughts boldly, she started to smile for some reason.

“That type of thinking isn’t bad.... If you change your mind, just tell me on the spot. Oh, and don’t worry about fees. It’s all on me.”

“... I understand.”

Then, we started walking again. In a while, we arrived at the main street. She boarded a horse carriage parked on the side.

The carriage didn’t look like something for public use or for-rent, but rather her own property. And although it was furnished in a simple manner, anyone with a good eye would immediately see that its quality was high-class.

.... So maybe she wasn’t lying when she said she was the head of the Azuta Conglomerate.

As I brooded, she called my name, and I returned to my senses.

Mm, then...!

I steeled my will, and stepped on the carriage.

As we kept silence between us, the carriage traveled for around half an hour. I felt that we were at somewhere far away, and saw that we were already in the thickets of the aristocrats’ area.

Our cart entered a place that looked extravagant even in comparison to other high-class estates.

.... Ha? The horse carriage kept driving forward.

“Welcome to the Ducal House of the Armelia family.”

“... Duke, sama?”

With her words, he felt another shock.

Back then, I thought that I would never even come close to someone like a Duke. I never anticipated such a situation.

“Well, come along in.”

I was ushered into the manor by the woman.

I believe it's safe to say that if I were to walk back by myself, I wouldn't even be able to find the gate. I would definitely get lost.

Before having everything taken away by "that person", my past life was fairly well-off. But even so, I've never seen such a chateau like this.

At last, we walked into something that resembled a guest room.

Well, at least I wasn't about to be shocked again anytime soon. I sat down in a chair.

"... Have you calmed down?"

"Do you think that I have.... No, does the madam think that I have?"

Now that I've think about it, I've never really used any etiquette while speaking. If this were any other situation, I will probably be demanded an apology.... Well, if it does come to that, I'll just deal with it.

This person probably still wants me to do something for her, so I probably won't have to do anything now.

"You don't have to forcibly change your tone and speaking, just learn slowly in the future."

Although I did have that idea, I didn't expect that not only did I not have to apologize, I was fine speaking the way I did.

Aristocrats typically don't even see us civilians as people.... Rather more like ants.

Because of that, I thought that she couldn't tolerate how I spoke with her.

"Ha...."

The evidence was that even though she said herself that it didn't matter, the female servant behind her shot daggers at me from her eyes.

"... Right, Tanya?"

But, she seemed to notice that, and directly spoke to her servant.

Because the master specifically says so, there's no other way? The servant sighed.

“... Yes, just as the miss says.”

“Then, let’s be generous of our words. The things I want you to do right now.... Aren’t much. To put bluntly, how about you learn the correct etiquette for your future job first?”

“... Ha?”

“From today on, you will work for my conglomerate as my hand. In return, we’ll help you get your revenge, and take care of your brother. That’s an exceptional deal, isn’t it?”

“Ah. This is too good to be true, so good that I’m getting really skeptical about any hidden fine print.”

“Hehehe.... What I wish is that you make good use of yourself after joining the Azuta Conglomerate. When that time comes, I will have instructions for you.”

“I have a hunch that those instructions will be quite daunting.”

Bread that falls out of the sky definitely has something hidden behind it.... I wonder what kind of instructions they will be.

“... I am the leader of the Azuta Conglomerate, the daughter of the Ducal House of Armelia, as well as the Feudal Lord Representative of the Dukedom.”

Hearing her suddenly officially introducing herself made me shudder unwittingly. Before, I thought that nothing on this world will surprise me anymore. But listening to what she said, I really received a good shock.

Thinking again, it’s fairly clear already. Since she lives in this estate, she possesses Armelia Ducal blood.

But I never imagined that she would be in such a direct bloodline, and much less have the same authority as the Duke himself over this land.

Furthermore, the daughter of the Duke Armelia is the woman who was excommunicated by the Church a while ago, causing massive disturbances throughout the whole region.

“As for any future repercussions, I won’t be able to do anything strange

or out-of-place. A part of that reason is because of my father, who is the Prime Minister. More importantly, I won't be able to face the citizens of my fief.... And, if I'm planning anything in secret, I would rather hire someone more used to that field than you."

Although I had questions about the first part of her explanation, I could accept the last part.

Indeed, she could easily find someone else more qualified to do those things.

"... You've noticed, right? I was the one who was excommunicated back then."

I found it hard to respond to that question. Seeing my silent expression, she started to laugh.

"I can tell the cat's out of the bag from your reaction.... Any moves that I make, will be followed closely by everyone else. My status as an aristocrat makes it hard to get matters done. Because of that, I need you."

After that, she roughly explained what the conglomerate wanted me to do upon recruitment.

So that's what she meant by using my prestige and power. Strangely, I could accept her terms.

"... Then, do you accept our offer? If you do, I'll have the doctor properly treat your little brother."

Just like that, I struck the deal with her.

# Chapter 93: The heart's door

“...Will he be helpful?”

After he had left, Tanya asked.

“Who knows? If I can just use him properly, I will reach my goals. All I need to do now is make sure tomorrow's negotiations are successful.”

I smiled recalling him.

“...But, with time, won't he grow as well?”

“What is your proof...?”

“Just intuition.”

Hearing my answer, Tanya wore a sour expression.

Seeing her reaction, I took in my smile and said,

“He looked a little discontent when we were talking about his younger brother, right? When I had brought up the topic just for fun, his answers were always surprising. When talking about the national treasure and how money goes around too. Even though you will find a lot of people praising Ed-sama and Yuuri-sama if you walk around the city... Being kept as a pet, huh? Quite the interesting expression.”

“I see....”

“...Well, above all else, I liked how he wouldn't be won over easily.”

When I said that with a smile, Tanya looked puzzled, as if she didn't get what I was talking about.

“I am sure, going forward... he will do work befitting of the favor I forced on him. But, that's all. He has probably made a clear distinction about it being just work and will probably not trust me otherwise.”

Business-like. If he just does his work good enough, that would be the best.

“He would always keep the possibility of being betrayed in his mind. For the time when he really gets betrayed... Exactly because he was betrayed

once before. Maybe that part of him overlapped with mine.”

Although saying that made me a bit sad.

But, this is what I truly think.

He too has a very heavy door in his heart. ‘How far can I open it? How far to let them see the real me?’ He is probably always thinking of such things.

Same as me.

And that’s exactly why I didn’t feel any sort of discomfort because of his bare wariness. In fact, I could accept it as being only natural.

I was even able to empathize.

....Well, if he was to work at a firm from now on, I would like him to learn to express himself a bit more without words, though... That was how much he was exposing his feelings.

But who knows... maybe because he came colliding with me with his honest thoughts like that that I was pleased.

Even Moneda who is in the same trade guild wouldn’t do something like that and I can’t even tell what goes on within Sei’s head these days either.

Hearing my words, Tanya cast her eyes down, looking a bit sad.

Feeling a bit awkward in that atmosphere, I stood up to head to the office.

Tanya probably calmed down hearing that sound and came following me.

Returning to the study, I took a sit.

“.....Tanya, prepare something warm for me to drink.”

“Understood.”

While Tanya was making tea, I gazed at the scattered documents.

I do have the negotiation with that head of the company tomorrow so I guess I will refrain from working today.



After all, if I were to collapse after working till late, it would come down to nothing.

Suddenly, my hands stopped turning over the pages.

I had stopped when I saw the document titled 'The trade guild's decision'.

A company can open a business when its representative registers it with the trade guild and the trade guild accepts it.

As long as the company has that document, it can continue its business.

Even if the head of the company were to pass away, that permit document also gets passed down to their child as inheritance.

However, if the child is young and doesn't have any experience at work, a guardian can continue the business until the child can succeed the business.

In that case, the guardian is to manage the company while helping the child gain more experience and hand over all right to them eventually... or at least that is how it's supposed to be.

But... in the case of the child not submitting an application of inheritance of the company to the trade guild, that would be regarded as if there were no lineal ascendant and the company's permit would automatically be handed over to the 'guardian'.

And the only times another person can get the permit is when the representative of the company officially submits a blank form or when they don't have any successor.

Inversely, if that form isn't submitted and if there are no successors, in that case, the company will shut down.

.....In short, that was what the document said.

"Even still, to think it wasn't updated for over 10 years... that is pretty amazing on its own."

I said to myself.

However, it is necessary for the permit to be updated every year in Duke Almenia's territory.

There, they lightly ask questions such as who the representative is and if there are any changes in the products they deal with, etc.

It came along with the new tax report and now if the taxes aren't paid and these questions aren't answered, they can't update the permit.

Besides that, a sudden inspection is also done on whether they are actually doing the business they said they would be doing, whether they are doing anything illegal, etc.

On the contrary, at the capital, the permit is only rewritten when the representative has changed.

The permit not being updated for 10-20 years is quite common there.

....Well, one could argue that it can't be helped as there are way too many firms in the capital.

"Excuse me."

Tanya was standing in front of me, with the requested warm drink.

"....Ah, that reminds me, Tanya. You did quite a good job this time as well. Thank you very much."

I was reminded of how amazing Tanya's intelligence gathering skill was these past 2-3 days.

Really, what is she aiming for... that is one of the biggest questions I have.

"....No, I only did what I was supposed to."

Tanya answered indifferently to my appreciation.

However, her lips were making a slightly upside arc.

"You worked hard to get us this far. Now I need to do my work properly tomorrow as well."

"If it's you, my lady, I am sure you will be able to do it without fail."

“Fufufu.... thank you.”

# Chapter 94: Outfoxing

Now then, today's the day of the meeting with that company's head.

Alright!.... After getting myself psyched up, I got into the carriage.

The company I am headed towards now is one of the companies which pulled out some of my employees by taking advantage of my excommunication strife.

A guy who had made a fuss at my shop before...

The carriage stopped in front of that building, which was located at one of the most prospering lands, even in the capital.

I glanced into the shop a little. It seems like there aren't many customers in.

Sei informed the managers of the shop that I had arrived and soon we were guided into a reception room.

....The atmosphere here feels is a bit odd.

That was what first came to mind when I saw the reception room.

Many furnishings. There were dignified furnishes which gave off the same feeling as those in our reception room but, on the other hand, there were also some which kind of glittered and looked very flashy.

It almost feels like 2 people who had misaligned tastes did whatever they wanted with this place... Looking at the place as a whole, it comes off as very mismatched.

On top of that, the unnatural blank space between these products also gives off an odd feeling.

There was probably something placed there before.

As proof of that, one could see the marks of a painting which was probably hanged on the wall before.

....Are they in the middle of remodeling? No, that can't be. Surely they wouldn't let a guest into the room while doing that.

...Then did they perhaps sell it? The chances of that are higher.

While I was deeply pondering about that, the company's president appeared.

Gaudy. That was my first impression of him. As if he was using gold threads for his clothing. There were a lot of laces as a whole and seemed like heavy clothing for a man.

"Nice to meet you. I am Vuld Rankam. The president of this company."

"Nice to meet you as well. I am Iris, the president of Azuta conglomerate. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

We started off the conversation with a smile.

"Even still, to think I would be able to meet the famous Azuta conglomerate's president."

"Same here. I have quite the good luck, to be able to meet the president of one of the top companies here in the capital."

'Hohoho', I laughed while hiding my mouth with my folding fan. This style of laughing is that of an evil daughter's in stories.

Seeing that, his eyebrows twitched slightly.

Oh dear... did I perhaps touch his nerves already? I was planning on unnerving him after having a little peaceful conversation, though.

"...What are you saying? It wouldn't be an exaggeration to even call you the top in the capital."

Oho? I wonder if it's okay if I start poking him already.

"Oh, I am greatly obliged. However, we are just newcomers here. It's not like we have history here like your company does. Moreover, your company is also looked out for by the prince Edward-sama... Really, I am very jealous."

The moment I said that, Vuld immediately wore his smile again. I guess he got back to his feet, huh?

"...Thank you very much. But yes, I guess that is true. I am very grateful

that Edward-sama is appointing our company to a very responsible post.”

Ah... So you're going to use Edward-sama as your shield, huh? That is exactly this company's shield and lance.

“...By the way, the work of art placed in this room are very wonderful.”

I changed the topic here. It is a bit sluggish but only a fool would go straight to his demands. The other party will just take advantage of a situation like that.

Even if we hold more power in terms of capital, that doesn't matter. The other party is trying to get the talk to his advantage by using Ed-sama as his shield.

To advance things the way I want to, I can't afford to lose focus here.

“...I am happy you think so.”

Seems like the other party is also loosening up on the offensive a little.

“Yes. They are all very beautiful, I can't help but be entranced. If 'all' of them were together, it would have been quite the magnificent spectacle.”

And once again, he displayed his surprise. Is my assumption a hit regarding the unnatural blank space?

“....We were in the middle of remodeling, after all. I am truly ashamed that you had to look at the incomplete state of this room.”

His face while he said that looked as if he was trying to steel himself. If it were one of the presidents from our territory in his place, they would easily soften the atmosphere without showing any sign of agitation.

Thanks to my discussions with those people, I think my skills in these situations have gotten a bit better. Better be thankful to those people... Seriously, now that I am confronting this guy here, I can truly understand how much of a sly dog the presidents in our territory are. I would really like them to hold back a little.

“Oh? Is that so? I am sure it would be an excellent room when all the pieces are gathered. What are you planning on decorating over there?”

“.....That is, still under consideration.”

“Is that so... sorry to have asked so many questions like that. After all, you're Vuld-sama who is in good terms with Marquis Rudolf. With the help of Rudolf-sama, who has the greatest sense of elegance, I am sure you will be able to get something excellent for that spot.”

The moment I said that, his mask peeled off.

# Chapter 95: Negotiations

Marquis Rudolf was one of the nobles who was part of the second prince's faction.

I don't know what he thought but after he attended the commemoration party of the foundation of the nation, he sent me an invitation to a party he was hosting.

...Now then, one thing bothers me here. Why did he react so much to Marquis Rudolf's name?

The answer to that is simple. That is he wanted to hide his connection to Marquis Rudolf.

"...Sorry but, why bring up Marquis Rudolf's name here?"

"You are very close with him, right? So much that you were able to ask Edward-sama for your request."

".....!!"

Vuld was so surprised that his mouth opened wide in reaction. Ah, he gives off such interesting reactions.

Hiding my smile with the folding fan, I just silently looked at him.

"...More importantly, let's move on to the main topic."

"Main topic, you say?"

"Yes, that's right. It is about our management collaboration with Bennel conglomerate and Azuta conglomerate."

"If I remember correct, we were supposed to provide funds in exchange for Bennel conglomerate's location and personnel in the capital and other places... right?"

"Yes, you are correct."

"...I am sorry but, I cannot consent to that."

"...Wha!"

"It is certainly true that we need places and labour. But it would be fine



if we just acquire them from other sources... I do not think I want them as much as to pay you the amount you asked for it.”

“That might be true. However... If I may say something, Iris-sama, I had assumed that Azuta conglomerate wanted to have connections with Edward-sama, though.”

There it comes. Using ‘Edward-sama’s connection’ as his lance and shield, he is trying to bring about conditions advantageous to himself.

However, I do not plan on agreeing to their terms.

After all, the fund they requested was absurdly high. To the point where it makes you wonder how they loaned such an amount of money...

“Yes, it is exactly as you assumed, Vuld-sama. We, the Azuta conglomerate, want a connection with Edward-sama to make a foothold in the capital... However, after thinking it through, we decided that we could just consult someone else. Just as your company consulted Marquis Rudolf.”

“How do you...!”

He didn’t even try to keep up his appearances anymore. He expressed his surprise just like that.

“Fufufu, our company has quite the big ears, you know? I would suggest you to not always find faults in your employees. After all, if they were to complain at a pub, it would spread very easily.”

This is why I appreciate Tanya. Really, her information gathering skill is amazing.

“Kuuhh.....!”

“We have gone astray from the topic, haven’t we? Even after you went to all the trouble to ask Marquis Rudolf for a ‘request’ to make a connection with Edward-sama and got labor from Azuta Conglomerate, now your company’s internal condition is that of a fiery chariot. It’s already in a precarious state.... If I were to reject today, you would have to close down your shop tomorrow, wouldn’t you?”

The 'request' was to have Ed-sama be a little partial to his company. In other words, he needed Ed-sama's protection to take personnel from our company.

If that happens, it would be harder for me, who doesn't want to aggravate the situation with the royal family, to complain about royalties.

Well... it is not like I am the only one who doesn't want trouble with the royalties... it is the same for other businesses as well.

In other words, this would mean they would make the whole trade guild discontent so there is nothing to be afraid of.

Normally, when they try to extract personnel from our company that blatantly, we could also display our exhortation through the trade guild as well.

However, we were not able to do that because they were under the protection of the royal family, other than the commotion of the excommunication.

And because of that, our complains were all crushed.

Of course he wouldn't want me knowing this.

Now let's return to the main topic.

It was probably a good deal for Marquis Rudolf. After all, he would make profits just by being an intermediary to Ed-sama for the merchants.

And as it is a relation connected by 'profits', when the operation of the conglomerate gets this bad, it is pretty obvious it would be cut down.

“.....”

He was in a state of clear dismay.

“.....At this rate, you won't be able to do anything because of the debt. You have two choices, either to stop the deal with me and commit a double suicide with your company, or to cleanly cut your ties to the debt and the company and start anew.”

He looked at me with hate. Well, I guess that can't be helped.

He tried over and over again to say something, but stopped himself.... However, as if he just suddenly realized something, his restless expression calmed down.

....What did he realize?

“....Meaning, your condition is for me to retire, correct?”

“Yes. In turn for not providing funds to this company, you will not hold any connection to it ever. That is my condition.”

Vuld sighed and wore a smile. As if he had just sorted everything in his mind, he wore a refreshed expression.

But, seeing that, what I thought was....

Shameless – that one word sums up what I thought.

His eyes were flaming brightly, not matching that expression.

Even at this stage, he is only thinking of how he could profit.

“.....I understand. I will abide by those conditions then.”

# Chapter 96: Conclusion

And then, after carefully going through the documents we had prepared, he signed it.

“...Received.”

I also checked the documents and accepted it. And then handed it over to Sei. All that's left is for Sei to submit the copy to the trade guild.

“...Alright then, Vuld-sama. Let's call it a night with this. Time is valuable, after all. To me, and to you as well.”

“Oh my, you're being quite hasty now, aren't you? Well... you are a president of a company so I am sure you are busy but from this point onward, I am jobless. Do I have any time worth that much?”

Saying such, he was still laughing.

To which, I wore a puzzled expression and replied,

“Oh? ...But I think you're far more busier than me, though. After all, someone who has lost his job needs to inherit another business.”

“I do not have such business I can inherit, you see.”

“Ah, I see.... Ah, but, are you done packing? Please complete it within a week, alright?”

I said with a sneer.

“I do think there is no need. From the point I signed that document, it has been decided that this company will be closed. Since the company will be closed and you will settle the debts, all the land and buildings belonging to the company will be turned over to me, personally. So I do not see a reason for taking my private possessions.”

He said with a smile, explaining it neatly.

“...What do you mean? I am pretty certain that the document you just signed just said you would be leaving the company... It surely didn't say anything about the company closing.”

In response to his explanation, I ended up replying with a far lower voice than I had thought.

“Whatever it is... The papers I have signed said that I would leave the company but I have not touched the permit at all. I do not plan on handing over the permit to anyone so the company will end up closing, inevitably.”

Hearing those words, I shivered. He probably saw that and his eyes glowed with a sense of superiority.

Ah, I can't help it anymore...

Being unable to hold my laughter, I hurriedly hid my mouth with my fan.

“...Is something funny?”

He came asking without even trying to hide his displeasure.

“Thank you very much for your thorough explanation. However... are you not getting a bit too impertinent?”

“What ever do you mean?”

“What do I mean...? Well, after all, this company isn't really your ‘personal possession’, you know?”

It was quite hard putting together my words all the while trying to hold back my laughter.

“10 years ago... after the president of the company at that time and his wife died from an accident, you took control of the company. Taking advantage of their child not being of age, you hardened your foundation in the company and took power... And then you expelled the son and all the officials who sided with him. Am I wrong?”

To my question, he looked up at me with shock.

“H-how do you....?!”

“How...? It is something one can easily know if they check with the trade guild.”

“However, it means nothing if the person concerned does not register.”

“Fufufu. I said so before, didn’t I? I have big ears in this business. I already pinned down his location and talked it over with him. He said he would inherit the company and updated the permit just a while ago. All that’s left is for you to resign and the company will be his.”

“Kuugghhh...!”

“Too bad for you. You probably thought that if the company collapsed, all its belongings would be yours.”

His face had lost all red and turned white. His whole body was shaking.

“...Don’t screw around with me....”

He said like a whisper. However, as he said it with such a low voice, I couldn’t understand.

“... Don’t you screw around with me!! What, what rights do you have to....”

As he kept getting more and more heated up, his words were starting to become audible again.

And within a while, he started shouting. It could probably be heard outside the room as well. Wondering what was going on, more and more people came looking in on the situation.

However, he probably didn’t notice that or his mental state wasn’t well enough to be paying it any heed, his wandering gaze fixed onto Sei.

And then he grabbed on to him to snatch the papers.

The one who stopped that was Tanya, who has hiding in the shadows.

She grabbed his hands and locked them behind his back.

“Guuh..!”

“That is as far as you go, Vuld Rankam.”

Weaving his way through the crowd, a man entered the place. Seeing him, Vuld’s eyes opened wide.

“Why is... Karim here....”

“You let the cat out of the bag, huh, Vuld-san? I am surprised you were able to remember my name even after 10 years. Do I resemble my father that much?”

In response to the words Vuld said unintentionally, Karim replied like he was enjoying himself.

“.....Ah....”

Overcome with surprise, Vuld was looking at Karim.

“10 years ago, after losing both of my parents at once, you had quite the guts to say ‘leave it all to me’ and drive me out of my own house. Thanks to that, I had to desperately stay alive these past ten years.”

He was smiling but his eyes were definitely not happy. In fact, the atmosphere around him made it feel like he would start resorting to violence anytime now.

“.....Karim.”

As I called out his name to make sure he was in control, he smiled at me, showing that he knew and then closed his eyes for a moment.

“There are a lot of things I would have liked to say but... well, what do you know, now that you are finally in front of me, they don’t really come up, do they?”

Saying that, he opened his eyes again.

“I have already reported that, I, Karim Douma, the son of the previous head, will inherit the company. As I am an adult now, from the moment you signed that document, I am the head of the company.”

Saying that, he looked around.

At all the faces with expressions saying that they didn’t understand anything of what was going on, he raised the trade guilds permit papers.

“And, as the head of the company, I now officially declare that we will be in business partnership with the Azuta conglomerate. I won’t accept any objections.”

Karim declared. It appeared that he was a master of this, and his presence could be felt.

“...I am sorry but could you throw this man out? I wouldn't bear any harm coming to my important business partners. Besides, that man has no relation with the company anymore.”

Tanya nodded to his request and dragged Vuld out. As Vuld was still in a daze, he didn't really resist either.

“...Ah, that's right. Vuld-sama.”

As I called his name, Tanya who was dragging him out stopped.

“The aid money to the company is nothing but for the deficit money. The amount of money you had provided in the beginning was for the company... On the papers you had signed just now, it had clearly stated that. Please properly pay your own debts yourself now.”

I said with a smile.



# Chapter 97: The Reflections of a Man

It is those far off days that spring to mind when I close my eyes, Those warm days when we all lived together as a family.

Father had managed the company back then, the workers loved him, the business continued to expand, and as a child, I looked up to him. I thought he was majestic.

My mother...she could be frightening when she scolded me, but otherwise, always wore a soft smile and was a truly warm woman.

And while we did have servants, my mother would cook everything, supporting father even behind the scenes. As a child, seeing my father and mother smiling at each other gave me a sense of pride and a sense of warmth.

And then there was my spirited, bright-eyed younger brother. It was the first time I would know someone that was younger than me. And for that reason, I swore in my heart to protect him.

We were that sort of warm family. Those were such gentle days.

The loss of them was truly unexpected.

...They say that a person will understand the true value of something once they have lost it...they were right.

The things that we enjoyed and took for granted, how hard, in fact, were they to come by. How privileged we had been.

With these recollections, I turn remorseful... and wistful.

That is how important those days were to me.

Suddenly, I open my eyes.

What enters my vision is the study.

The room that I am presently in is the president's... in other words, the room that my father had used; had thrown himself into his work.

When I saw it long ago, there was a great deal more books and

documents around, it had appeared to me as an awfully disorderly room.

Now it seemed deserted, and the sight that entered my vision was strangely lonely.

As these thoughts returned to me, I straightened my curved back against the backrest and tightened my hands into fists.

Finally, I've taken it back...

The loss of it all was truly sudden.

On that day...father and mother had taken a carriage to the royal capital on account of some business.

I did not think, nor could I have ever imagined as I saw them off, that they would be involved in an accident and would cease to exist.

I received the news that my father and mother had died. There was no time to grieve, and I had to make preparations for the funeral and handle other matters.

I was still very young at the time, and it was Vuld Rankam, who was the deputy head at the time, who conducted everything in my place.

"It will be fine, just leave everything to me."

I had lost those I depended on, and in my loneliness, I appreciated those words beyond anything.

And so I did everything as he instructed.

"...There's a little trouble at the Conglomerate. Unfortunately, they may bring the investigation to the former head, your father's house as well. Would you mind leaving the house and live in hiding somewhere else for a time?"

And that is why. ...I accepted what he said, so unquestioningly.

And so I left the house and began living in hiding in a rundown house located in a corner district of the royal capital.

"I'll come back for you one day."

He sent us off with those words and a scant sum of money, and there I

and my brother lived for some time, in concealment.

One week...two weeks, and then a month.

By the time three months had passed, I could not help but think it strange, and I made my way to the market.

And there I would realize, for the first time, that I had been fooled.

“...I’m sorry, but who are you.”

Those were the words he blandly uttered.

“What are you saying...It is me, it is Karim. I am the son of the former head of this Conglomerate.”

“...The former head’s son, most, unfortunately, passed away along with the former head and his wife.”

“You, what are you saying...!”

“...Somebody!”

I had opened my mouth to say more, but Vuld had called someone.

“This miscreant is claiming to be the former head’s son. Throw him outside.”

Is what he heartlessly said.

“Stop...! Please, don’t do this...!”

Vuld offered a pitying look as I struggled wildly.

And then he approached me as I was dragged away, and brought his lips to my ear.

“...I have dismissed everyone in this Conglomerate that knows you. No matter what you might say, it will be in vain.”

“...Wha...!”

“...You were such a good child. Pure, the sort that no matter what people said, what they did, you did not know to mistrust them. I had even considered placing you at the top, to be controlled...but things have proceeded far better than I could have hoped.”

He said with a grin, and as if saying that he was through with me, signaled with a look to the men that were dragging me. Consequently, they increased their force and I was briskly thrown out of the Conglomerate building.

As I was still young, I did not know how or who to appeal to.

And that did not change as the days passed. However, in order to live, I needed to secure an income somehow.

Eventually, I was able to sustain us both, but then my brother fell ill, and we needed even more money; by then revenge had become a distant priority.

And so I've continued, drudgingly to this point.

Bearing an anger that could not be unleashed.

And amongst all of that, she appeared. Saying that she needed my name and my help.

"...Pardon me. The head of the Azura Conglomerate is here to see you."

I was brought back to the present at those words, from the employee who had appeared with a knock.

"Let her in."

The person who entered after a brief moment was the woman who had taken me up.

"I'm sure you are very busy, and I do apologize for taking your time like this."

"Not at all. It is for you. There is no question that I'd make time for you."

"Fufufu...you've become very adept with words."

She laughed gently. In the darkness, I had thought that she was beautiful, and that impression did not change in the light.

"I came to sign the contract today. Let's take what's been a verbal agreement up until now and document it clearly in writing."

"Yes. That would be preferable."

The woman to her side handed the contract to me, which I reviewed and signed.

“Indeed. Well, then. I look forward to our partnership, starting tomorrow.”

The verbal agreement with her...in the first place, she had said that she wanted my help.

About wanting to unite my Conglomerate and Azura Conglomerate's transport department, and to carry out shipments under my Conglomerate's name.

“How is the job?”

“There is still so much I need to learn. In truth, the people that you sent from your place have been of great assistance.”

The aftermath of expelling everyone who had assisted Vuld was a serious shortage of laborers at the Conglomerate.

And so we had the Azura Conglomerate send us workers.

“Fufufu, I've heard tales from them. That you never leave anything to others, and that you have a rather covetous desire to learn.”

“ ... ”

Somehow, I couldn't quite agree or deny it, and I unconsciously shut my mouth.

Seeing it, she laughed once again.

“It is a good thing. Use them, along with me. Never allow others to influence you, hold on to your will and work hard on the task at hand. If you do that, I believe that even through hesitation, you will continue to work without losing yourself. That is my advice to you as your senior.”

“...then you also have moments of hesitation?”

“Why, of course. I am human just like you, and I am your senior by only a few years. Many times have I hesitated, felt regret and distress.”

It was a little surprising. Knowing her, I had thought that any hardships

would be met with a fearless laugh and be overcome, just as when I first met her.

“...But. It was because I had a fixed vision, that there had to be something that I could do, even with such hands as mine.”

“...and what was that vision?”

“I met children at the orphanage, and after I had read stories to those children...I started a business of selling those stories as picture books. And the profits we gained from them were sent to the orphanage as a donation. I think it was after that when I realized. Of course, it is important to earn money, but I understood that the ‘profit’ needed for the Conglomerate was not that alone, that is my incentive. ...Do you as well, have that sort of ambition or vision?”

I pondered on her words for a moment.

So, the vision that I pursue...

“There is no need to hastily decide if you do not have one now.”

She said and smiled, perhaps it was because I had not opened my mouth for a long moment.

“...One day...”

I opened my mouth to utter my thoughts, just as they were.

“Work related to medicine, and also, I want the kind of job that will put smiles on the faces of the people from that town.”

“I see...”

But in truth, I do not know at all, how I am going to get there. I do not know what I need to do.

Yet even still, if I managed to accomplish that....surely, I could say that everything I experienced up until now was not in vain; I believe that.

Her smile simply deepened as I spoke those words.

# Chapter 98: Too Late

Various matters concerning the Conglomerate have now been settled.

Owing to Karim's Conglomerate now assuming the role of transportation, it is now possible to pass through the borders with the tariffs at standard tax rates.

The reliance on Karim's Conglomerate for transportation meant the realization of reduced costs on exorbitant escort and personnel fees for other Conglomerates as well.

And Karim's Conglomerate would, in turn, gain a profit.

A true win-win relationship for everyone.

In truth, negotiations with the Feudal Lord of the fief, who had imposed the tariff increase, have not been going well.

Interferences from the second Queen have likely had a hand in that.

The tax rate is typically left to each Feudal Lord's discretion, even if I should make a request for the tax rate to be lowered, due to the excommunication being a false charge, the matter would be over as soon as the reply was, "How fortunate for you. However, I am raising the tax rates of all of my fiefs. That is the policy we've set".

I can't help but sense a motive behind the simultaneous raising of tax rates around Armelia fiefs alone.

But making an appeal would only go as far as the second Queen, who was ready and waiting.

There is no doubt that she would just crush it.

Even if father is the Prime Minister, he does not have the authority to command the other Lords.

The King alone has that authority. But the King is confined to his bed from his illness.

Well...even so, it does not change the fact that Feudal Lord's are granted the right to make their own decisions regarding tax rates.

At least during times of peace, a King would seldom exercise his right, and encroach on a Feudal Lord's decisions.

I suppose this is what it means to be blocked from all sides.

...at least I accomplished my purpose, perhaps I'll just return now. Sebastian may be a capable man, but the workload must be reaching a tremendous amount by this time.

Ah...however. If Dean is there, he may be managing it.

I sorted out the documents, thinking on these matters.

"Tanya. I'm considering a return to the fief."

"I think that would be for the best. I shall adjust your schedule at once."

Well...there will be many things to take care of and people to address first, I'm sure I will need to remain a number of days, still.

"Thank you."

Ahh, how I've missed those lands.

This hadn't been like the one to two years absences that I've had during my student years, but it still feels as if I have been away for a very long time.

I supposed it shows just how crowded the past few days have been.

"My lady, a letter from Mimosa has arrived."

I received the envelope from Tanya and broke the seal with a paper knife and viewed its contents.

I feel that my ability to read quickly has greatly improved.

After reading through it once, I close it and return it to the envelope.

"...it seems quite serious."

The contents of the letter was a response to the apology regarding Damme.

It was a reply very typical of Mimosa, that I should not give it much thought, and that she would be very saddened if I stopped inviting her out



of consideration.

However, from there on, it somehow started to drift into talk of marriage.

There seem to be... she seems to be having a difficult time in finding an engagement partner.

It is not surprising, Mimosa's family are of the neutral party...that would likely make them very cautious.

But I also sensed in Mimosa, an anxiety over using that as an excuse to continue on this leisurely pace.

For children of the aristocracy, the ties you hold with your spouse's family are very important, and it is important to ascertain what factions they belong to, or which they intend to be affiliated with.

You begin to understand how vitally serious the family status of your partner is.

However, time continues to roll by at a steady pace even as you stop to consider.

...the age of marriage among the nobility is notably younger in comparison to Japan.

But of course, the social background and values, everything is different, so that is something to be expected.

With Iris's memories illuminating my own, I can understand Mimosa's sentiment of impatience to a degree.

But only to 'a degree', and not 'fully'.

I am not even married myself...I no longer hold onto dreams of marriage.

I write a reply to the effect that it would be best for her to calmly wait and not worry too much.

It is so important to make sure of not just the person, but the family... the weight these lines carry when written by me; I smiled in self-mockery.

"...by the way, I wonder how Ryle and Dida are faring."

Ryle and Dida had been taken away by grandfather, yesterday and today respectively.

They are supposed to be my personal guards, but...well, I suppose it is fine, as I've built up a heap of documents concerning Kyle's Conglomerate, and have no plans to leave the house.

"I am sure those two will be fine, being away for a couple of days. They have spent years training under general Gazelle after all."

"...That is true."

As I was speaking to Tanya, we heard the sound of knocking on the door.

Tanya went to open it and see who it was.

As she continued speaking with the servant, Tanya's expression grew more and more severe.

"...send him away, immediately."

"But..."

The servant winced at the ice in her voice and the force of the words but stood his ground.

"Very well. I will go then."

She said as if there was no point in speaking further.

But the servant's expression changed to that of relief at Tanya's reply.

Perhaps an indication that the visitor was...of a certain level of importance.

"...Tanya."

"Excuse me. I will go out and deal with this."

Looking at Tanya, I understood that she did not want me to know... Whatever the matter was, she meant to handle it in private.

"Wait a moment. Tanya, who has come to visit?"

"My lady, you have no need to concern yourself with this. I will take care of everything."

“...Tanya.”

As I called her name once again, she looked at me, a troubled expression on her face.

“It is Van Lutasha that’s come to see you, my lady.”

“...Van...”

In spite of myself, I felt an uneasiness from hearing his name.

“It would be better if you did not recklessly contact him, so long as Ryle and Dida are not with you. We cannot predict what he is thinking, what he might do. ...Besides, his visiting without any prior announcement is beyond insulting.”

She is right. In any case, there is nothing at all I wish to discuss with him.

Why must I to listen to what he has to say when he did not do the same for me, when I once needed him.

“...You are right. Thank you, Tanya. Send him away.”

“Certainly.”

# Chapter 99: Why

Van had come... what possible reason could he have had, coming to see me at this time... I could not help but ponder on this.

It could have only been related to the excommunication upheaval.

Apparently, Van's father had been relieved of his position as Pope and condemned to imprisonment.

I feel that he would be better served by relying on those he's befriended up until now, instead of coming to me for help...

Yuri Noir, the Baron's daughter...she has gained somewhat of a political voice since becoming Edward's betrothed.

Ed is the second son, and his maternal grandfather, Marquis Maeria was now at the height of his power.

Ah...but, Berne is immersed in the daily work he's undertaken under father, and it would be difficult to see him; Dorsen as well, appears to be very busy ever since he joined the Knights.

But then, I too have plenty of appointments to fulfill.

Ahhh, I just want to finish this and go back to the feudal land. Surely, he wouldn't impose on me once there.

What does he intend to say to me, face to face... the mere thought of it reeks of trouble.

"I have returned, my lady."

As I was contemplating on such matters, Tanya had returned.

"You were quite quick then...?"

"Yes. I hurriedly sent him on his way."

Her expression was one of composure, but there was insolence in her voice.

Tanya appeared to be quite irritated by it all. I will have to do something for her later.

“Did he say anything?”

First things first, I must learn what I can.

“Nothing. He said nothing... for I ran that man off before he could even open his mouth.”

Tanya was smiling, but her eyes were serious. If anything, she exuded such an intensely chilling air, that it sent shivers through my body.

I wanted to ask her how she got him to leave, but was now too afraid to.

...at least, Tanya wouldn't do anything too strange, so I suppose it is alright. I want to believe it is alright.

“It's fine then. There is really no point in stressing over him now. Tanya, please put away those papers over there.”

“Yes, my lady.”

Tanya replied, a bright smile on her face.

“...incidentally, my lady.”

“What is it, Tanya?”

“Vuld has, we've lost sight of him.”

“Oh...”

As a precaution, his movements had been under surveillance since he had been driven out of Karim's Conglomerate.

We did not want our work to be hindered out of spite as it was that time with Damme.

“...Do we have reason to believe he will attempt anything towards us?”

“He had made no contact with Marquis Rudolf...and the other nobles would not take him seriously. In the first place, he does not even have the sufficient funds left to attempt something. He must have gone into hiding in order to escape his debts...I believe that is the most likely explanation.”

“I see... I hope that is so. From now on, I want the resources spent on Vuld to be used to survey the actions of nobles that belong to the second

prince' party instead.”

“Are you certain?”

“Yes, I am certain. Each store has its own guards now, and I have Ryle and Dida close by to protect me. You must not worry about me. ...I think it would be much more advantageous to look into this matter of the party of the second prince.”

“Certainly. I will do as you say.”

Tanya; she's become quite the intelligence operative. I've been hiring men with that very occupation of late, and Tanya has been the one the one holding them all together.

In truth, the Armelia Duke...that is to say, father, already has such people under his employment at present.

But ever since the scandal regarding the excommunication, I have deeply felt the importance of information, and have little by little, started to gather people who could serve me personally.

Well, it is indeed difficult to find such people that you can truly trust, and so they are currently few in numbers...For this, I must rely on the connections of my father, mother, and grandfather.

“...Let us quickly finish the work here and go home.”

“Yes, my lady.”

# Chapter 100: Dida's dissatisfaction

“So, master, why do we have to go as well?”

Oddly enough, Ryle didn't seem to have an issue with my attitude.

After all, I was always taken care of by my master, there wasn't anything demanding that the mistress had to attend to, and Tanya was also by her side. So there should be no issue!

“Haha, don't say that. I also want to leave this noisy capital as soon as possible, and go back to our land to enjoy some relaxation!”

Master was a currently serving general.

But that was also a role that had the significance of being a hero in reputation and duties.

Originally, Master was supposed to have retired years ago according to his age...it's just that no one has emerged who is stronger than him.

As his age increased, Master's strength has suffered, but at the same time his technique has been improved through practice.

Even now in his weakened state, he could still match Ryle. It seemed like we couldn't treat him as an ordinary old man.

After all, there were no more than five people among the military section and knights that could actually stand up to a match against Ryle.

So you could say that Master's strength had decreased, but you couldn't say that his overall power had been lost.

Anyways, that was besides the point.

At the moment, Master's job consisted of barely any actual duties. After all, there hadn't been any large-scale wars within recent years.

Right now, his job was only to coordinate the relationship between military and knights, and to train potential replacements.

So even though he had the title of general, he should actually be quite free in terms of action.

Normally he was in his own territory. A while back he also hung out around Duke Armenia's territory as well. Although he occasionally went to the border to observe the happenings, that was mostly just to satisfy his urges to walk around.

Generally speaking, he shouldn't be around the palace that much.

He himself had said he hated all the complicated rules and regulations.

But recently Master was always hanging around the capital, and was often moving in and out of the palace.

The only reason I could think of was the proposal submitted to "disband the army".

"Master, are there any movements from above?"

"Um, there's no equipment right now. But if we're not here, I don't know what will happen."

He responds with a bitter expression.

His existence is something that the various lords and officials could not overlook.

After all, he had the track record of a hero, and was extremely popular even among the common people.

As long as Master remained, he could exert pressure on all sides.

That was why he frequented the palace so often recently, to see if there was any strange turn of events that might be occurring soon.

"I don't start wars because I like fighting, but I'm also not an idiot about these things. Without the protection of the military, who will defend the country? Yet Edward-sama seems not to notice this at all...the opportunistic nobles who were agreeing with the proposal at the meeting think that even if the country ceases to exist, they can avoid the turmoil by staying hidden in their own land. Even so, they overlook the danger of turmoil."

"The mistress has already taken the possibility of battle into consideration, Master."



“Is that so?”

Because of what I said, Master let out a sad chuckle.

“I’m an old bag of bones that can at least function as a bit of pressure when needed. If I turned that child’s resolution into a bunch of empty worries, then I really must work harder.”

“Is that so, if it’s for the mistress then there’s no other choice.”

“What are you saying? Your social network isn’t broad enough to become a force for exerting political pressure. You’re just here because I can let my anger out in your presence.”

“Um...Master, I’ve suddenly lost all motivation.”

“Hey, Dida. As long as we can be useful to the mistress in the end, we should do all that we can. Of course, protecting her is the most important part of our job.”

There was nothing more to do. If that was the case, I could only accompany Ryle and keep going on with Master.

# Chapter 101: Dawson' s Request

“What’s wrong, what’s wrong! You aren’t mustering up enough strength for the sword!”

Squeak, squeak! The swords ground against each other, making the grating sound of metal on metal.

The good-hearted Ryle was currently instructing the knights on technique in the form of combat.

On the other side, I was dealing with the people from the military.

...how did things come to this!

Yesterday I did carry out a simulated battle against Master...well, more like a depressurizing session for him!

I don’t know why, but the people from the military and the knights were watching us from the distance as we fought.

Unlike when we previously attended the capital’s simulated battles, this time their eyes carried a slight hint of respect and fear.

Well. At the time I thought that being watched was no big deal, so I just ignored it. But today someone ran over and asked me directly whether I’d be willing to compare our skills in a battle.

Master said that it was good to at least humor them, so I accepted with the thought that it would at least be a good way to waste some time.

...but now it’s clear that this isn’t a simulated battle at all. We’re just helping them train.

I don’t know when Ryle started getting invested, but it felt like he wasn’t really fighting a worthy opponent, but more just training the Armenia troops!

For such a rare opportunity, he could have picked way better opponents...I occasionally also wanted to really have a serious joust with people aside from Ryle and Master!

Suddenly, I felt someone’s eyes on me.

Just in time for me to knock the sword out of my opponent's hand. Let me confirm who was watching me.

Hmm, that person was the son of the knight order's leader. His name seemed to be Daw...son? Whatever, names didn't matter. But that asshole was definitely one of the people who treated my lady disrespectfully!

Why, why is he staring down me and Ryle right now, with a look on his face like he wants to say something?

Even as these questions popped up in my mind, that bastard's existence itself was making me angry. Best to just pretend I didn't realize it was him and focus on fighting.

"...could you instruct me in a simulated match?"

Just as I concluded my previous match, Dawson ran over to ask me.

His actions seemed to sink the knight order into a strange panic. Seems like they were worried about how I would respond to him!

"Hm, all right."

I responded casually, planning on extinguishing the concerns of the men. But hearing his response, I could no longer stay calm.

"...If I win, please let me meet the daughter of Duke Armenia."

What was this guy saying?

"...What did you just say?"

"Exactly what I meant...I just hope that you might allow me to see her once."

"I'm just a guard. How could I bring something like that up to my lady?"

"I've already sent a request to meet to the Duke's family, but I was rejected...everyone on the outside knows that she trusts you deeply. If you intervened, you could potentially arrange a meeting."

"...trust and such isn't a relevant issue here. Why is it that we, who respond to our lady, have any responsibility to do this kind of work for people like you!"

“...That’s why I said, if I win...”

“...Interesting.”

Heh heh. My heart was already filled with anger!

What did he want from my lady?

Did he want to harass her again, or try to get close to her...or is it that only now he remembers to apologize for what he did beforehand!

No matter which it is, now that we’re at this point, how could I allow any of them!

“Ryle won’t do, but you think that you can defeat me, is that it? Huh. Get started! If I win, you’re not allowed to so much as approach the lady!”

The judge seemed confused, but still sent out the signal for the match to begin.

So, how was I going to teach this bastard a lesson now.

Right now my heart was filled with anger for him. Ah, even my body felt restless. How long had it been since I got so angry?

Licking my lips, I focused my thoughts on how to best beat this asshole before me down. Ah, probably in a way that the military and knight order wouldn’t stop me.

...but, it seemed like I was thinking too hard. My body moved reflexively!

In a single moment.

A single moment reflex, and I knocked my opponent’s sword out of his hand.

Che. I was planning on toying with him a little longer before pushing him to the edge. Whatever.

Last time Ryle had gone too soft. This time it was my turn to really beat him up!

Thinking this, I didn’t stop and didn’t soften my blow as it descended upon my opponent. But- “...What the hell is this, Ryle!”

“Calm down, Dida.”

For some reason, Ryle had stopped my sword.

“I’m very calm, so don’t stop me. If you understand, get out of the way.”

“You don’t understand at all.”

Damn, now I was riled up! This guy who always kept our lady at the top of his priorities was now standing up for this guy who had hurt her. I thought he was a reliable warrior, but what was he thinking now?

“If you keep protecting that guy, I won’t spare even you.”

“...All right. Then come at me.”

As we spoke, I poured more force into the sword in my hand. But even so, Ryle didn’t back down. Instead he responded by increasing the force of his hand as well.

“...Open your eyes and look closely, Dida,” Ryle said as he blocked my sword.

“Huh, what am I supposed to be looking at?”

As I said this, I couldn’t speak anymore, because I saw Dawson, who was sitting behind Ryle on the ground.

That moment, my sword arm dropped.

“...Why did you stop?”

The question came from none other than Dawson himself.

“I should be the one asking here. Why do I have to help you make your wish come true!”

“...that...”

“Take a look at yourself, how pathetic you look. Che, what a disappointment.”

“W-wait a minute...”

Dawson shouted at us, seeing that we were about to leave the battlegrounds.

But I didn't plan to listen to him, so I didn't turn around.

"If even you won't punish me, who should I ask to punish me?!"

What the hell was he saying? I couldn't help myself and walked back to him.

And then, I pulled out my sword and stabbed downwards. Even though it hadn't been edged yet, it plummeted straight into the ground.

"Stop playing around here."

I announced this curtly, staring Dawson down.

"Who you should ask for punishment? Who the hell knows...the cause-and-effects between us are no longer straightforward enough to count out."

Being able to apologize and have all mistakes forgiven...how could something that ideal happen!

Experience regret with full sincerity, taste that bitterness thoroughly.

Blame yourself deeply, imprint that punishment into your heart.

And then really experience it. Our anger, our lady's sadness.

After saying this, I left the battlegrounds for good, without looking back.

Ryle didn't seem to have any issue with what I had done, and left alongside me.

And then, we began our own training anew.

# Chapter 102: A Sister's Ambush

The day before we left the capital, I took Tanya with me to walk around on the streets.

As a matter of fact, we had no gaps in our schedule. But since we could only come around the capital so often, we still wanted to make time for a shopping trip.

Plus, I want to bring home some souvenirs for everyone who was still hanging around back home.

“What does everyone like?”

For Rehme and Moneda, I prepared the capital's specialty sweets. The two of them were performing cerebral work, after all, so sugar was essential.

But for Sei and Merida, sweets would only make them think of work. So what should I choose then?

“Any gift picked by you will make everyone happy!”

I could only smile awkwardly in response to Tanya's answer.

“That makes it the most troublesome. I rarely get the chance to give other people gifts, so I need to pick something useful to others...if it's something they wanted already, that would be even better.”

As usual, I changed before leaving. Even though we'd already went through a few shops and picked a few backup gifts, I didn't think most of what we were seeing were good gifts...

Just as I was worrying and strolling along the street.

Ah...that person's silhouette looks familiar!

“...Dean.”

I didn't expect it to be Dean. What's more, there was a woman I didn't know next to him.

Why was Dean here...and who was the woman by his side?

Questions like these took over my thoughts. I didn't know why, but my chest felt suffocated.

Ah...no, no. Why he was here, who the woman was—none of these were things I could interfere in.

Right now he wasn't in a contract with me. It was his freedom to be with who he wanted to.

Waving aside my doubts, I kept trying to convince myself. But somehow the uncomfortable feeling in my chest remained.

Just then, Dean noticed me as well. In that moment, his eyes went wide with surprise.

Seeing his reaction, my heart felt even heavier.

...maybe we should just go home soon. But turning around right here was so unnatural. Plus we hadn't finished shopping for everyone!

"Milady, it's been a while."

"Dean, it has been a while. I didn't expect to encounter you in the capital. Who is your companion?"

"Nice to meet you. My name is Letty. I've been meaning to thank you and those around you for looking after my older brother."

"...brother?"

Upon closer inspection, she did look a lot like Dean.

If you really had to name a difference, Dean's eyes were deep green like jade, while Letty's were bright like an expensive olivine stone!

"Yes. My family is rather overprotective of me, and they don't allow me to leave home myself. Every time you helped Big Brother, I would be at home managing things on his behalf. I apologize for not being able to visit until now."

Oh. In that case, I've probably become indebted to her indirectly.

Now then, I should also take the opportunity to express my gratefulness!

"You're too polite. If it's convenient for you, let's go somewhere else to



talk. I also want to hear how my brother works under you, milady,” Letty said with a smile as radiant as a flower.

“Milady, please don’t pay any heed to my sister’s requests. You’re such a busy person, no need to take time out to accompany my sister...”

“Hm, is there something that Brother doesn’t want me to hear?”

“Letty...you...”

Strangely enough, Dean seemed quite frazzled when standing next to Letty. It was the first time I’d seen him like this.

“Hehe,” I couldn’t help but chuckle.

“I agree. It’s not convenient to talk at length here. Let’s find a place to sit down and talk.”

Just like that, we entered a restaurant. It was a restaurant that had a good relationships with the Armenia family, so they just gave us our own room.

If it were in a random cafe by the side of the road, I wouldn’t be able to introduce myself properly. That would render my disguise pointless.

“Hello, let me formally introduce myself. It’s a pleasure to meet you, my name is Iris Lana Armenia.”

“Nice to meet you. My name is Letty. Thank for you looking after my brother for so long.”

“That should be my line. For the longest time Dean has helped us out. Because of him coming over to help, you must have suffered through a lot of trouble. I’m truly sorry...”

“That’s an exaggeration...I like my work anyways. I also have a lot of respect for you, milady, so don’t talk of trouble!”

“Ah...”

Why does it feel like Letty’s eyes are constantly sparkling!

Plus, we were only meeting for the first time. Suddenly bringing up respect like that—I didn’t know what she was talking about!

“Within a few years of your reign over Duke Armenia’s territory, you’ve managed to expand your land’s economic development immensely. What’s more, many have even moved over because of its liveability. You’re a woman, yet you are active at the front line of politics and economics. As a woman, I feel happy and proud to hear your accomplishments!”

It’s like she saw through my thoughts and provided me with an explanation!

Even though she’s an adorable child, she really is Dean’s sister!

“Thank you...you also seem to work for Dean. What kind of help do you provide him?”

“I generally organize information that has been collected, and engage in relevant communications based on the information...but most of the communication parts really goes to my brother. I provide background support and occasionally help out.”

“Background work? Organizing information and preparing for negotiations are all jobs that need patience. Although I’m a substitute leader, that’s also my main job. I think it’s not so different from what you do.”

“You shouldn’t say that...in your situation, milady, you have to make decisions that you’re responsible for after reviewing all of the information. So it’s completely different from my job. But hearing you say this, I’m happy as well.” From that point on, I enjoyed talking with Letty...at least I think I do...

“Uh...does Miss Iris often experience this as well?”

“Yes, quite a bit. After hours of sifting through documents, I’ll have a headache at the end of it.”

“Exactly...especially at night. It’s very difficult to get up in the morning!”

Somehow, our conversation turned into concerns about health and how to relieve stress.

It didn’t seem like something that we in our teens should be talking

about.

We should be talking about something like our romantic troubles, or which dessert place was the best. Something that was more suited to girls our age.

But it did seem like Letty had been working hard the whole time. Her concerns in this area were completely relatable to us. Without realizing it, we had become obsessed with the topic.

Right now Dean had been abandoned on the side. It was just me and Letty talking.

Suddenly, Letty's smiling face fell. Her attitude turned serious as she suddenly changed the topic.

"Lady Iris, as someone in a supporting role, I have something to ask you...you're obviously shouldering a workload that's two or three times what most people have. Just like my brother has me, shouldn't you also find someone to share your burden?"

"My current workload has already lessened quite a bit...there are some reliable people in the merchants' guild, and my work in the territory has the servants at home and your brother to help me."

"Ah...has Brother managed to help you?"

"Of course. Your brother is very detail-oriented, and can always attend to the split ends and other details very well...and he hasn't made a mistake in his work yet. If Dean wasn't here, I don't know where I would be now."

Yep. Dean was my important right hand man!

Although I couldn't really explain it clearly...but, if it were Sei, Tanya, Rehme, or Sebastian, no matter how perfectly they could complete my orders, they still wouldn't understand the point of my words.

After all, they weren't able to stand in my shoes, so I couldn't ask them to be observant on every issue.

But Dean somehow wasn't tied by that. He was always able to give me suitable opinions.

Whether it was something I came up with on a whim or after deep thought, Dean could always give me suitable suggestions on how to realize them most effectively.

In the end, it was always a better result than I could come up with alone, even after thinking long and hard.

Dean really was my right hand man...or perhaps someone like my partner.

“Hm, is that so...Brother really is quite attentive to details. And because of that, my work becomes much easier than it might be.”

Letty's answer made me smile.

“Heh, that's true.”

“Letty, I feel like this isn't something we should discuss in front of others.”

Dean piped up for the first time.

“Uh, Brother, I don't know when I'll be able to meet Lady Iris next. So I'm saying all I want to say now.”

“...Speaking of that, Letty, you don't seem to leave home much.”

“Yes, my family is too protective of me. But Brother keeps running around for work. If I'm gone from home as well, then a lot of work won't be able to proceed and everyone else will suffer a lot of trouble on my behalf.”

“Hm. Then Letty, are you usually in the capital?”

“Yes.”

“I think I'll be coming here again. Then we'll see each other then!”

# Chapter 103: An Uninvited “Guest”

“Next time be sure to visit our territory.”

“Oh, yes. After I finish all my current jobs, I’ll be sure to go.”

“Then we’ll see each other next time.”

After that, I continued my quest for a suitable gift.

Tomorrow we’ll be returning to our land, so I hope I can get something today.

In the end, I bought a handkerchief for Sei and Merida at an accessories store recommended by Letty, and got sweets for everyone else just as we had planned originally.

While we were taking the carriage back, I was immersed in immense satisfaction. But when we arrived at the gates, that person showed up.

“Miss Iris!”

Saying this, that person approached.

Ryle and Dida immediately stood in front of me, protecting me from the person in question.

“Ah, I wished to see you...Miss Iris, would you be able to reward me with your attention for a few words?”

This was a person I was familiar with.

“Sir Van...why are you here...”

The moment I said the name, Ryle and Dida’s sense of danger seemed to heighten.

And Tanya had also chased him away previously when he showed up unannounced, so her expression was less than pleased as well.

“As to why...I wanted to meet with you beforehand. When I was told you weren’t home, I went away. So today I took the time to stay here and wait for you.”

“Even so, you’re being very rude right now. No appointment, coming

straight to the door...you're completely disrespecting the Duke Armenia's family!"

Tanya responded aggressively to Van's excuses.

Although Ryle and Dida didn't come to shouting, they seemed to hold the same opinions and looked quite unhappy with the situation.

"...Forget it, Sir Van. It's not convenient to talk here. Let's talk inside."

"Miss Iris?"

"I don't want to cause even more mayhem at the door. Sir Van, I'll hear you through. Come on in."

Although it was said in quite a rude tone, I wasn't so gentle as to treat an uninvited "guest" like this with courtesy.

Taking a deep breath, I walked into the door.

"What a heavy-hearted reception."

That was what Van said the moment he sat down.

Everyone here viewed him with caution and hostility, after all...of course, Duke Armenia's servants were not so out of control that they would show all this on the surface.

Even in this guest room, Ryle and Dida and Tanya stood by me, as if guarding me.

"Did you think you would be welcomed here?"

"No. I misspoke."

"So, what are you here for? I'm returning to my land tomorrow, so please make this explanation short."

"...I have a favor to ask of you."

"What is it?"

Although I had asked him to keep it simple, he hadn't even mentioned the word "negotiation" before going straight to the topic. His uncharacteristic impatience surprised me.

Before that, he had come directly to visit me and ask a favor without so much as an appointment. The three beside me right now were simmering with fury, almost ready to pounce within a moment's notice.

"I want you to be my sponsor."

"Ah..."

Although I had seen it coming, I never expected him to say it outright...I couldn't believe that he was shameless enough to do so!

"I caused you a lot of distress this time, so this might seem rather thick-skinned of me...right now, I'm in a difficult situation. And the Church of Darryl is also a mess internally...if we continue on like this, the situation in the Church might seep out and affect the whole kingdom itself. So as a son of the head of state who caused this turmoil, if I construct a cooperative relationship with you, the victim of this event, and show that to everyone...I think there's no better way to suppress the turmoil than that."

What he said was true. After the previous mess where the pope and his followers were cleared out and held responsible for their actions, the Church itself was a huge mess at the moment.

At the same time, I had also heard that they were investigating nobles who had secretly formed alliances with the pope...but those nobles were only abandoned pawns, small characters not even worth mentioning. Whoever was behind the scenes and responsible for all this couldn't be traced at all.

"...It's true that the Church of Darryl's current chaos is harmful to the kingdom."

"Then..."

Van's eyes, fixed on me, gleamed with the excitement of expectation.

But, I was really sorry for this.

"...But, if I help you, how will I stand to benefit?"

I flipped the question on him with a cold tone.

# Chapter 104: Negotiations (1)

“Benefits?”

Van’s expression seemed puzzled.

“Yes, benefits. If I cooperate with you, what benefits do I get?”

“Before mentioning benefits, don’t you have any ideals of saving the kingdom when it’s in danger as a noble of the kingdom?”

“Well...you’re saying strange things now. Originally, if you weren’t scheming how to frame me for various crimes, how would you even end up here?”

I started to giggle. Really, I was laughing from the bottom of my heart.

“Also, originally, the chaos didn’t just start today. With their eye on the succession to the throne, nobles split into two parties...no, if you count the neutral ones, perhaps three. With this situation going on for as long as it has, it’s a miracle that this country is still intact.”

Although I don’t know how they managed it, I was thankful to the officials who were responsible for allowing this country to continue functioning.

If the faction wars were more intense than they currently are, it wasn’t difficult to imagine that the lives of people would be even more terrible.

If neighboring countries took advantage of this opportunity to attack us, it wouldn’t be anything unexpected.

And those who prevented the worst possible situation from happening deserved admiration for their methods.

Although it’s ridiculous to compare a country to a territory, if I were to use managing a territory as a metaphor, the leader would be me alone.

It’s exactly because I had no opposition that I could enforce many new policies with an iron fist; being in a ruler class with only oneself is not difficult.

On the other hand, if I were to run this country, anything I wanted to do



would be opposed by enemy forces, while my own side might even lean towards the other side occasionally, until I might suspect that they weren't even fully faithful to me.

Not only that, but you had to ensure your opponents around you didn't try anything.

Under the current environment, aside from work there were plenty other things to fritter away at one's energy levels.

And then, of course, the actual work itself was running the risk of "any misstep would turn into a crisis that would threaten the country itself"—a tightrope situation.

Ah, I should prepare some stomach medicine for my father...as I thought this, I gazed at Van.

"And you, who were one of the main causes of the country's current state, are now able to talk about preventing that chaos and joining hands with me? Which one of your mouths is fibbing this time, hm?"

"I never did anything to endanger this country."

"Hm, what a lack of self-awareness. Are you close with Sir Edward, by any chance?"

I giggled again. Was the laughter angering him? Van frowned.

"We are. We're from the same academy, so that's a given."

"That's not a given. That's why I asked...that school is a microcosmic version of this country's nobles and their society. You come together because your parents are in the same faction. Although I don't know if you were chasing after Sir Edward or Yuri...but if you were together like that all the time, anyone would come to the same conclusion—'Sir Van, and the pope backing up Sir Van, are in support of Sir Edward.'"

In that case, me and Bern were really in danger.

Originally, because I was Sir Edward's fiancée, Bern should have maintained his distance from him...what we didn't expect was that Bern approached Edward or Yuri on his own.

Even if I've been marked by the shame of "having abandoned an arranged marriage" in the noble society, I understand even better my father's wish for me to distance myself from them.

"You're a part of what has increased the internal conflicts of this country. And even now you can still say you're doing it for the country? Don't make me laugh."

# Chapter 105: Negotiations (2)

Van bit his lip hard.

“...So, I don’t plan to continue negotiating with you. Please forgive me for departing now.”

“...Please wait!”

He approached me as I stood up.

But Tanya, Ryle, and Dida stood between me and him.

“Do you have any more business with me?”

“I, I...!”

I observed Van coolly as he shouted.

“What should I do! Help me please!”

Help me please...hm. Hearing his words, I couldn’t help but start laughing scornfully.

“Why oh why must I help you?”

“That...”

“I’m the ‘evil woman’ who was picking on the ‘gentle’ Yuri, right? Didn’t you already admonish me alongside Sir Edward? You want a person like that to help you without offering me anything in return?”

My voice was so cold that I scared even myself.

Hearing his pleas for help, my mind remained blank, thoughtless.

Of course I had no sympathy for him. And my position was no longer the warped sense of satisfaction I had felt in the past.

All that there was was...nothing. It really felt like nothing. I no longer cared what happened to him anymore

“My father was rejected from the position of the pope. But I thought that Yuri would continue to be by my side, just like before...!”

“But he suddenly became a stranger. As if we’d never known each

other.”

All in all, all Yuri wanted was the power of the church backing him up.

“Everyone else too, they were completely different. So cold. I...”

“So what?”

I answered coldly.

“Treated like a stranger by those you love? Everyone became cold, uncaring? Even if that’s your situation, I don’t really care. You must not have cared either when you chased me out of the academy, hm?”

Hearing me mock him, his face contorted.

“...Ah, it’s true. Yes, I stood on the side that pushed you out. And after doing that I still came here. Even I feel that I’m being an idiot.”

“Oh? It’s good that you understand that. If that’s the case, then please leave as soon as possible.”

“But even so, I can’t give up. I want to show the people who left me behind that they’re wrong. I don’t want to just give up without doing anything!”

“Ha...”

Hearing him snarl, I laughed. Was it mockery of him? Not completely so.

Unbelievable. Such a laidback, easy-going fellow, becoming like this because of how badly he wants change.

His face still twisted, he shouted, even though he knew that it was hopeless, so disheveled I could hardly connect him in my mind with the man I had known at the academy.

“Ah, yes. Honestly, I don’t care about the country. I just want the people who’ve abandoned me to come back. That’s why I’m here...!”

“So what if they come back? You beg for her love? Beg that you can continue to stand by her side?”

“...They abandoned me. They don’t matter anymore. I just, I’m just doing this for myself...!”

...What a selfish, selfish way to think.

But I wasn't surprised. I understood the feeling as well. Even now, deep down, I wanted them to come back to me.

But at the same time...what a dangerous way to think.

The definitive difference between him and me was that I didn't treat it as my ultimate goal. If I were trapped in that kind of mindset, I wouldn't be able to face all my followers with a clear conscience.

But Van right now...he was treating it as his only motivation, his only goal.

A sharp aura surrounded him because of how badly he wanted it. No matter what happened, he would not give up.

Once again, I sat down opposite him.

"So you want to join forces."

He nodded.

So it was...I also still held onto the wish that they might come back for me. That's how I got so far.

...what a pity.

"Even with my support, you'll never become the pope at this rate. The organization is undergoing a complete transformation."

I still maintained contact with Priest Ralph. His reports were clear enough: Van would never be pope.

Most of the people in the upper society of the Church had been arrested without hesitation. The proposal to do away with pope as a hereditary position was also pretty much been passed with few objections.

As a replacement, in the future they planned to have cardinals vote on who would become the pope.

"In my position, compared to supporting you, I'd much rather support Priest Ralph, who has shown his capabilities in dealing with the current situation. Now that the Church isn't your realm, no matter in terms of

experience or other abilities, you'd never be able to compare to Priest Ralph. If you continue down this path, it's hard to say if you'll even be able to stay within the religion itself."

Van, after all, was currently in an awkward position. Without all that had happened this time, he would have entered the Church to accumulate experience to prepare for his future role...but now, he didn't have that route available to him.

To the Church of Daryl that was currently trying to get rid of the old system, his existence was a pure impediment to progress.

It was unclear whether or not he'd even be able to keep his right to remain a member of the Church.

"...but to set you up in another church might still be possible. Of course, as an anticlerical."

I knew the person who was the priest and head of the church there on a personal level.

If it was him, perhaps I could ask a favor.

"A completely average anticlerical. You might not even be able to enter the actual church, let alone be a pope. But the person in question is more likely to trust what he sees in you rather than what others say. If you accumulate and display your personal abilities, maybe he would be willing to give you more responsibilities."

...So. What would he do?

In regards to this question, I couldn't see any confusion or hesitation in him.

# Chapter 106: Negotiations (3)

After we exchanged a contract, he left.

“...why were you so kind to him?”

Ryle said with some dissatisfaction.

I was a bit surprised that it wasn't Tanya asking. But a glance in her direction told me that she was thinking the same thing.

“Kind, huh?”

I couldn't help but laugh out loud.

Seeing my reaction, both of them looked surprised.

“Immediately prepare to reach out to Priest Ralph.”

“Yes, milady,” Tanya responded.

“...I also told Van. Right now, the Church of Daryl is in the midst of revolution. But not everyone agrees with the movement. That's to be expected.”

It wasn't just the higher level church officials who had benefited from all that was going on, but also the nobles who were closely connected with the church.

Those people, the nobles and the officials alike...wouldn't want to watch this revolution from the sidelines without doing anything.

They would undoubtedly engage in some kind of obstruction.

Van's bloodline put him in quite a bit of danger.

That's why I wanted to pull him to my side...before the other side got him first.

“...Right now his regret and dissatisfaction with the situation has been transformed into motivation with some help from me. If we give this information to Priest Ralph, he'll be able to use it to the best of his abilities. What I told Van wasn't a lie. At the moment, it's a good plan to set him up in the capital to study medicine and service the people. This

will undoubtedly be what Priest Ralph is planning for, and will potentially open up a path into the main church. What's more, we'll be able to cash in on the favor he owes us now."

It was a step taken with full faith in Priest Ralph's abilities.

"On the other hand, even if he forgets his current dissatisfaction, that's no loss to us. I'll still be able to access his movements, and eliminate all potential contact with people on the other side. If we succeed, perhaps we'll be able to cash in on a favor in the future on Priest Ralph's side."

"I see. Then I'll have my subordinates keep an eye on him."

"That's exactly what I was going to ask you to do...no matter how the situation ends up, it will prove beneficial to me. Isn't that right? Then, how is this kindness?"

When he came to me with his plea, I realized that no matter how things developed they would be beneficial to me.

That's why I couldn't stop laughing.

Well, it was a good situation...after all, I was the rich villianness. And Van had delivered himself to me.



# Chapter 107: Tanya's concern

“Phew...”

Combing through the hair I'd let down, I sighed.

It was almost at the time when the calendar was about to flip over, signifying the end of a day.

After I finished preparing all the small things milady needed to finish before going to sleep, I was also about to go to bed.

Although a lot of people ask, “Do you really ever sleep?” in a half-joking way, I'm human too. Of course, sleep is necessary.

Plus, this seemed like a more suitable question for Mr. Sebastian rather than me. He looked as if he would never tire, always with a gentle expression on his face. How admirable.

I needed to treat him as my role model, and continuously improve myself to that end.

As I mulled over one thing after another, I suddenly picked up the ribbon on the table. The one that was in a set with Merida, milady, and Rehme.

...When was it? I recall it was back when I was still practicing as a servant girl.

When milady's father invited a merchant friend over, and milady was asked if there was anything she wanted, she picked out these hair ribbons.

“That's all? What about these gemstones?”

Seeing milady pick the ribbon among a collection of luxurious and expensive items, her father seemed somewhat incredulous...her mother also tried to convince her to pick something else.

“Yes, this is enough. May I please have four of them?”

And then, milady brought the ribbons to us three.

“Everyone is the same.”

Saying this, she smiled.

Although it was quite a high-price artifact for us...but for milady, who was the daughter of a duke's family, it should have been something cheap.

But to her, they were treasures.

"If you don't like them, I'm sorry. But I was thinking that it would be great if we could get them all in a set. If you'd be willing to take them I would be very happy."

I felt that that day, I was so happy. Happy that I was picked up in that place, on that day, by milady.

If she hadn't, I probably would have died somewhere.

I don't remember when I started living there. But I was probably abandoned by my parents.

What I do remember is that I was there, alone—in the slums of the capital.

Young and clueless as I was, I went hungry every day and gradually began to deteriorate.

Every day, I sat in the alleyway, and stared up at the sky.

Occasionally, I'd see children hand in hand with their parents. I didn't know why, but it made me cry.

So this was my fate, to die alone...yes, before long, even I lost the will to live. In fact, I wanted to disappear as quickly as possible.

And then one day, two men that I didn't know started speaking to me.

What they said was unclear. I don't remember anymore.

But their dirty smiles made me understand instinctively that these were not good people.

Although I had already given up hope for survival, my body still reacted to the danger out of instinct. I wanted to escape, so I started to run.

Running, running...but a child without stamina couldn't hope to run away from these men. I was about to be caught.

Milady was the one who stepped in back then and saved me.

I had been running with all my strength. Fortunately for me, the route that I was taking was in the direction of the main street—I charged in front of her carriage.

“Are you hurt?”

The first time I saw her, I remember thinking—why is it that the world she and I exist in is so different? I shook my head.

“That’s good...hey, do you have anywhere to go?”

In response to that question, I shook my head again.

“Is that so...then, do you want to come with us?”

After that, although her servants tried to stop her, she still brought me along...and so I was saved.

“I kept feeling that she was being pursued by someone. I’ll tell my father about the people who were after her.”

Later I found out that those men were out to catch orphaned children and sell them at market for cheap prices.

Because they saw me being picked up by milady and her servants, they decided to give up on me.

And then, according to her suggestions and the reports of the servants, they were all arrested.

“From today onwards, let’s live here together. Your name is?”

“...I don’t know.”

“Is that so. Then, how about Tanya? It’s a name that has appeared in a fairytale, the name of a smart princess.”

Taking my hand under the sunlight, that’s what she said with a smile on her face.

That warm hand reminded me of the families I’d seen in the alleyway... tears flowed down my face.

“D-do you not like it? How about another name...”

Seeing me react like that, my lady sat up hurriedly, looking concerned. It was a very funny sight, but my tears still refused to stop.

I had been saved—in two different ways.

I hadn't just been rescued from a dangerous situation; my new mistress had given me a goal for survival, me who had already given up on survival.

So I didn't want her to be troubled or pained. I want to protect her from all the trouble and pain that I can.

Since she's arrived in the capital, she hasn't truly smiled even once. No matter when, she always wears a tired look on her face.

Of course, we came to the capital initially to soothe the riot, but that wasn't just it. Because there was so much in the aftermath to deal with, negotiations to be carried out, it was natural to be tense all the time.

Although it was only natural...but even in time that should belong to only herself, milady's expression was always gloomy.

“Milady, is there anything wrong?”

When we were sending off Dean and his sister, he asked her this question.

Even a man who only appeared occasionally in her life had noticed it. Of course, me and everyone else who served her at the duke's mansion had noticed it as well.

But even after noticing it, there was nothing we could do. That was truly frustrating. This was because we couldn't even figure out what the reason for the moodiness was.

But, even if it were only a bit...I felt that what was corrupting milady's heart, was probably this place.

To her, this was the place where that abominable thing had happened. This time, something also happened that was torturing her inside...it was inevitable that she would hate this place.

Even so, fundamentally...I don't know why, but in this place, she didn't seem like herself.

I didn't know how to explain, but she seemed like she was disguising herself as a villain.

As the daughter of a duke's family, not all of her actions shone bright like when she was younger.

She's grown up...that's unavoidable.

Even as a servant, I sensed it. Living in upper class society, where everything was traps and schemes, she couldn't stay the same way that she used to be. If she did, the lowlifes who wanted to take advantage of her would only gather and swarm her.

Maintaining her cool, suppressing her emotions to make hard decisions was a necessary front for milady.

But I couldn't figure out why, in the capital, that side of her seemed more prominent.

Her sunny smile was gone, replaced by a cold smile that hid her true emotions.

It seemed like she was trying to play the villain in her every move.

Perhaps she realized that as well, in her own subconscious.

I yearned for the day that she could return to the territory, but there was still work to be done...it seemed so.

Wanting to go back as soon as possible, that urgency of longing—perhaps milady, who was praying for that day to come as well, was tired out by everything, anything.

All I could do was also pray for the day we returned to our territory.

# Chapter 108: A secret meeting at night (1)

Knock knock. I opened the door.

Seemingly without reason, Dida was standing there.

“It’s quite late. What are you here for?”

“...Uh, sorry. Were you already sleeping?”

“Yes. Milady slept early today, so my work also ended earlier than usual.”

“Ah, I see...really, though, don’t open the door with your guard down like that. As a woman, you should stay on alert.”

“Well, we don’t really need to worry about that in this mansion...plus, I’m not completely without experience in these situations. If it comes to a desperate situation, I will use force.”

I said this with a smile. An awkward, bitter smile flashed across Dida’s face.

But quickly enough, his expression became serious.

“...what about opponents that you can’t deal with? What will you do then? For example, I would be able to defeat you easily.”

“True...out of everyone in this mansion, only you and Ryle are truly a challenge to confront. As for other enemies who might invade, if I do find any adversary truly challenging, they probably won’t have come for my looks, but for my life. Well...I still trust you two, for the time being.”

Our eyes met. In a late night like this, when both of us were silent and there were no other noises to interrupt us, the silence between us made the atmosphere exceedingly heavy.

“...You win. Of course I can’t do anything if you say something like that.”

Saying this with a smile, Dida shattered the serious atmosphere.

“So? What are you here for?”

“No, originally I was planning to have a drink or two with Ryle, but he’s already asleep. So I thought of you.”

“I can’t believe you...you’d call me out for something like that? I’m still a woman. If strange rumors start spreading about us, I’m not responsible.”

“That’s fine.”

Saying this, he laughed. I couldn’t read the true intentions of this man before me.

“Well...it’s true that it’s late. You’re getting up early tomorrow, right? Sorry.”

“Hold on a minute.”

“I’ve already woken up anyways...it’s a rare opportunity. Let’s go have a drink. I’ll go in and change, wait a minute for me.”

“All right.”

After that, I changed and walked out of the room.

Going to a bar or somewhere like that...it was quite a strange time for that. In the end we started drinking in the servants’ chat room.

The chat room is a room that all the servants share. As per its namesake, it’s a place where servants can communicate and say whatever they want.

Duke Armenia’s family has a mansion corresponding to its social status. More than half of that space is specifically for servants.

To maintain such a huge mansion and allow the masters of the house to live comfortably, they ended up needing a huge group of servants; at the same time, this structure was very fitting for a family that treated its servants so kindly.

“What do you want to drink? I brought this.”

“...Isn’t this a Makarama\* specialty product? How did you get it?”

“I grabbed it from Master.”

What a startling declaration, I couldn’t help but sigh.

“You...”

“Isn’t it great? Master felt sorry about what happened, especially to me

and Ryle. He said that this way he'd be making it up to us."

Saying this, that bitter, awkward smile came onto his face again.

Seemed to be quite a fit for this man's personality...thinking that, I accepted the bottle from him without a word.

"...If this is to repay you for your hard work, should I be taking a share like this?"

"Ryle said he didn't want it. It didn't really count as labor anyways."

That's what you say, I thought to myself as I took out two cups and began to pour us drinks.

Of course I knew that the two of them were busy running about each day for Master. They trained the soldiers as aides to the coaches.

At the same time, they protected milady and carried out various other tasks, all while using their free time to train everyone who followed them from the territory to the capital.

Recently I hadn't seen them around mostly because they were so busy with all of that.

In the past I'd also brought up the fact that they could have appealed to the master or milady to take a break from their work in the mansion.

But Ryle was stubborn. The man before me, on the other hand, bragged that he was "only going to Master's place to play".

We took the full wine glasses into our hands.

"Cheers."

The clear sound of glasses bumping together echoed through the room.

We poured the wine into our mouths.

A taste that was a bit sweet, but also quite rich spread open in my mouth.

"Ah...how delicious. A Makarama product indeed."

"...Yes. You really got something good out of this."



“Everything that Master owns is good wine. He’s such an alcoholic that he’s needlessly picky about it. That’s why people call him the drinking guard.”

Laughing, Dida poured all the rest of the wine down his throat.

“Time to go back, I guess. Finally.”

He said suddenly.

“Yes. So you don’t have to keep running between the mansion and Master’s place.”

“True. There are still various things to prepare.”

“...Are you also looking forward to going back?”

“‘Also’?”

“Don’t read too deeply into it. Just answer the question.”

“Hmm...I don’t know if I can truly call it a return. Where I am must be where milady is at. So it’s a bit strange for me to return to the territory.”

“True.”

This man was also like me, willing to sacrifice himself for his lady. His usual arrogant attitude made a lot of people question his loyalty though.

“But...well, when we go back to the territory with our lady...there are really too many obstacles here. We can’t really be by her side like we can back there...most importantly, there are so many people here who surpass us in power by far.”

“There don’t seem to be that many people who are stronger than you?”

I said this, playing dumb. Dida laughed. He seemed to understand as well. There was a strange bitterness in his eyes, a bitterness that he couldn’t express in words.

“I was kidding. Yeah, in the capital, you truly feel that you’re insignificant, weak. What we have...before the crushing strength of political power. No matter how long you train, you can never compare to that.”

“Exactly. So I want to go back soon as well—as milady’s protector.”

“Yes...”

\* I didn’t find this in the translations before, so I just ran with this romanization.

## Chapter 109: A secret meeting at night (2)

“What about you, making that expression? What, do you want to be complained about by some noble? Or are you unhappy about receiving the strict instruction of the senior maid once more?”

“Are you going to say that in front of her?”

“I wouldn’t dare.”

He laughed out loud while I sighed.

“No, not because of that...it’s just that I’m a bit troubled.”

“Whatever you’re being troubled about...either way, it must have something to do with the mistress.”

“What do you mean, ‘either way’?”

I glared at him, while he laughed, “Ah, sorry, what a disrespectful thing for me to say.” Seeing his reaction, I realized that what I was doing was letting out my frustration at him, so I sighed again.

“...Well, you’re not wrong. What I’m thinking about does have to do with milady.”

“...has something gone wrong with her?”

His voice and expression immediately became serious.

Seeing that, I felt at ease—to this man, milady was of massive important.

“You should have sensed it as well? The longer she stays in the capital, the worse she seems to look and feel.”

“That’s true.”

Dida nodded with a bitter smile.

“Because she has to keep her guard up, it’s no wonder that she’s becoming like that. But at the same time, I’m unhappy that we’re so helpless in this regard. As you say, there’s a massive, insurmountable power blocking me off...I think I’ve been too confident in my abilities up to this point.”

As those words came out of my mouth, a heavy, bitter sensation began to spread in my chest. I couldn't help but mock myself.

"Yes—well, so what? Everyone has something that they should do, their area of specialty."

"I understand that. But I can't do anything..."

An irreplaceable territory. Before me there was a wall that I could never cross. Because I understood this, I was in pain.

"No, you don't understand. For example, my specialty is being milady's protector. My body is a wall, and protecting her is my mission, my specialty...in that specialty, I won't lose to anyone. I won't step down for anyone. Even if I were facing off against you."

I didn't understand...yes, as I was denied power, the fury of helplessness filled my heart as I glared at Dida.

But what he said next made me relinquish all possibility of retorting.

"Well then, where is your specialty? Yours is accompanying her, helping her in her work. I couldn't do that. I couldn't make delicious red tea, couldn't help her get dressed, couldn't coordinate her schedule, let alone help with her work."

"That...I can't say for sure, but you're not wrong."

"I know you work hard. You learned self-defense from Master, learned the fundamentals of work from Mr. Sebastian...I know you're working on expanding your specialty tirelessly. And of course, it's good that this will be useful for our mistress. But isn't it also good that each human is limited in how much they can expand their specialty? If she thinks that these are your duties, that means she's handed a very important part of her own duties to you. And you've responded to outside requests and have deepened your skills within your own specialty as much as you possibly can."

Dida gulped down all the wine remaining in his cup.

"Am I wrong in saying that?"

“...No, not at all...”

I felt like something blunt had hit my head.

I wasn't too confident, but too proud.

Just like Ryle and Dida keep improving their protective abilities, Merida keeps improving her culinary skills, and Rehme keeps expanding her knowledge base.

Sei, Moneda as well, keep working hard to complete their duties.

Everyone is working hard at the duties they've been given, working at the specialty they possess.

“So what you're saying is that if we can't control certain things, we should just try to support milady however we can?”

I also poured the rest of my wine down my throat.

“...Yes. To calm her spirits, I'll do my best to accompany her, be by her side.”

This was different from the self-hatred of earlier.

I also had my pride.

Just like Dida said he wouldn't step away from his duties as a guard, I also had my duties to attend to.

“See, that's the expression we all know and love!”

Saying this, Dida laughed out loud as usual.

# Chapter 110: Return

“Finally, we’re back...”

I exclaimed.

...It really had been so long.

Compared with the season before our nation’s founding celebration day, I hadn’t stayed that long in the capital this time.

Even so, I felt like this...perhaps because every day here was so concentrated, so dense.

Last time I came back I also sighed a breath of relief, but this time I was even more relieved.

When I arrived at the mansion, all the servants came out to greet me.

“Welcome back.”

Everyone seems on the verge of both laughter and tears. I couldn’t help but also tear up a bit.

I really made everyone worry.

“We’re glad that you have returned safely...I, for one, am very happy. Please do rest well today.”

“Thank you, Sebastian.”

If this were any other time, I would have gone straight to the study. But this time I went back to my room.

That was because today I actually wanted to do what everyone said and rest.

At my leisure, I enjoyed a cup of red tea that Tanya had made for me.

Suddenly, the curtains began to shudder because of the wind. As if invited by the wind, I stood up and approached the window.

And then, I gazed upon the territory from my window.

It was so beautiful, this landscape. Everywhere was permeated with

green, and the parallel streets extending into the distance. I...loved the view.

Looking over this view that all previous generations of the family had worked to protect and cultivate, I felt a true pride for the heritage that I shared with them in the form of the blood flowing through my body.

I stared out at the scene before me, breathing out. I was so glad that we found a way to calm this riot...

That way, I could continue caring for this land.

“Ah...right, Tanya, can you call over Ryle or Dida?”

“Yes, milady. Are you going somewhere...?”

“Yes. I can’t just relax because I’m in the mansion.”

“True. Please wait for a minute.”

Tanya left the room, but walked back in quickly.

“I bumped into Dida.”

“Thank you, Tanya....Dida, could you come with me for a walk?”

“No problem. By the way, where are we going?”

“To my grandfather’s.”

“Ah...there. I understand. My duty is to accompany milady wherever you wish to go.”

“Thank you. Tanya, could you prepare a bouquet for me...do you want to come as well?”

“Of course. I’ll go now and prepare. Please wait for a moment.”

Tanya, Dida and I started walking...15 minutes later, we arrived at the place, where the trees grew tall and lustrous.

This was where the previous heads of house slumbered. For some reason, we hadn’t picked out a cemetery, but chose for it to be here.

I don’t understand why. But from here they could gaze upon the Armenia land...and rest here, alongside the mansion that held so many

memories. That made me jealous.

I paused before one of the tombstones that was still very new.

“...Grandfather.”

From Tanya’s hands I took the bouquet and put it in front of the tombstone.

Grandfather had passed away before I was admitted to the Academy. He was a gentle man completely different from my father, who had the face of a demon king. Because my grandmother was a kind, gentle person as well, I’d always wondered who my father had taken after.

But that’s beside the point.

Since I became the substitute leader, sometimes I would recall my grandfather and come here to visit him.

I think that he loved this land more than anyone else.

In my memory, just like I stood by the window gazing upon the territory, he often brought me when I was young along and looked upon the land as he spoke about it with pride.

He was so gentle. Even after I became substitute leader, I couldn’t help but think that it must have been difficult for him to work in the palace, where liars and the power-hungry took up most of the space.

But now things were different.

When I was participating in territorial politics, I often found traces of his work and couldn’t help but sigh to myself...while also allowing for self-deprecation.

Laughing at myself—for only seeing one side of a person and making the snap judgement that “this must be the kind of person he was.”

Anyone would understand it if they thought about it—the face that my grandfather showed me couldn’t be the same he showed when he was working. Also, I only retained memories of him when I was young. Could I really judge his character based on those shallow impressions?



I could only revolutionize the politics of my territory thanks to the foundation that he had laid for me.

I only realized this when I began to work on public institutions and equipment. My grandfather's work was everywhere.

Those policies had really been able to predict things not only 10 years, but decades later, especially in terms of confronting disasters. I couldn't help but be amazed at them.

...I also can't deny that to build a solid foundation for the future, I keep overlooking the foundations below my own feet.

I had been carrying this work out at the same time that I was dealing with my other duties...he really did love this land. I couldn't help but be moved.

"I'm back."

Saying this, I put my hands together in prayer.

I wanted to apologize for bringing chaos to the territory, and pray that my grandfather continue to protect and guard us in the future.

Although I knew there would be no response, my thoughts came in torrents.

"...I'm done."

I stood up, turned around. Tanya and Dida were smiling.

"Let's go back."

My mood had cleared up a lot, and we left.

# Chapter 111: Busy

“I want to learn more about the contents of this report. Please help me summon whoever was responsible for it.”

I pointed at the mountain of files on my desk.

“The ones over here are already decided. Return them to the various departments.”

And now it was time for the mountain next to me...the thought that there would still be more after I finished this load was almost enough to make me cry.

“That’s the part that needs editing. There’s too much needless waste proposed. If that section is necessary, please note your reasons for retaining it.”

And then there were more files next to me. I could already imagine the folks at this department hanging their heads in disappointment...those in the finance department should be of the same opinion as me.

“The bridge there is quite old...compared to our equipment over here, perhaps it would be better to fix the bridge first.”

...and it was only the second day back.

I had been surrounded by several mountains of paperwork since morning when I arrived in the study, and had been taking care of them slowly.

At this moment all I hoped for was that I could have a clone, but at the same time–“If you have time for those thoughts, why not spend more time working?”–that’s how I encouraged myself.

Even if I managed to somehow lessen the load of files just a bit, Sebastian kept bringing more and more in. The total amount wasn’t lessening at all.

If in the very beginning I put all the files to be dealt with together, they might not even fit in a soccer stadium.

Even someone like me would feel my motivation and energy draining away. I should be thankful for my aides, who brought me the files in groups.

Although Sebastian made an apologetic face when he brought them over, the situation was unavoidable because of my long absence.

Thanks to the riot this time, all the plans I had originally made had to be delayed significantly, so I had to work harder now.

In the mansion, some people had stopped coming to work because of the rumors spreading about me. But even after I was determined to be innocent, they still didn't come back.

If you asked me what I wanted to say...well, it was just that we didn't have enough people on hand. It was a very serious issue. I owed a lot to the officials of the territory who somehow kept working under these circumstances. More importantly, I don't want those who are laboring on the frontline with full commitment to fall ill due to overexertion.

"It's around that time of the year when the regions are supposed to hand in their tax reports. Before then, we need to handle everything that must be handled."

As I said this, Sebastian's expression changed.

Of course, this didn't mean anything good. Quite the contrary, actually, it signified trouble ahead.

...I understood. With the amount of people we had right now, we couldn't get any more work done.

Even so, tax reports were very important, so that we could understand the profits and income of each department and region. Those numbers were essential in measuring the future economic trends in the territory.

If profits were high, we could expect corresponding expenditure. If personal income grew, we could anticipate that people would relax when it came to spending; if the merchants' guild's income grew, we could look forward to them using those funds as capital when it came to opening up more businesses.

Because of this, I wanted to thoroughly read the tax reports so I could make use of them in the future.

...But under these circumstances, I couldn't do that. I needed to come up with some way to deal with the issue quick.

Scratch, scratch...the sound of pen scratching against paper echoed through the room.

"...It's about time to take a break, milady."

Tanya said this with some concern.

...Ah, it had gotten late already? I looked out of the window. The sun had already started to sink.

"...Hey, Tanya, I have a task I need your help with."

"Please let me know whatever I can help with."

"Please make a list of personnel that left because of the riot. If we can also gather what others around them thought of them and their social circle, I would be very thankful."

"I understand."

"Then, as you suggested, I'll take a break. Hold on, help me call Sebastian over."

Tanya lowered her head, leaving the room.

After that, I enjoyed the tea Tanya had prepared for me while I savored my break. At the same time, I was reading the letter sent by the Anderson family, the main couple.

In other words, my aunt and uncle.

The Armenia family and the Andersons had had deep ties with one another for a long time—since my grandfather's generation.

My grandfather and Andersons have also been similarly caring. Since the whole Academy business and the riot, they've always asked after me.

Although the Anderson family's territory is technically close to the Armenia family's western side, there are steep mountains and cliffs

separating us. If we wanted to visit each other, we needed to take the sea route. Most importantly, we were both busy, so we ended up relying on using letters to communicate with one another.

After I read the letter, I was about to start working again when Sebastian walked in.

“I was thinking that it was about time for milady to start work again...”

“Just in time, Sebastian. I wanted to ask you something.”

“What is it?”

“I trust that you’ve already recruited some temporary helpers at the merchants’ guild?”

That’s how Dean came to work here. Although it wasn’t anything big, he also helped with very detailed calculations, the organization of files and so on. People were recruited for work that required a lot of helping hands.

“Yes.”

“How is the recruitment going?”

“...Not ideal. Right now we’re in a busy time. Other places are hiring as well, many of whom can offer better pay. Plus, we can’t just hire anyone here.”

“I see...”

I sighed.

“...About that, Sebastian. I had a suggestion.”

“What would that be?”

“How about recruiting some people from the students of the Academy’s officials’ leadership program?\*

Hearing my suggestion, Sebastian’s eyes went wide.

“The content of their job would be various miscellaneous tasks. Although they’re students, if they’ve taken classes at the Academy, then they should be able to do the job. It would be a huge help for us, with how busy we are, and it would give the students a chance to learn about

working in a real work environment.”

“Yes...this is a good proposal. I’ll go inquire within the Academy.”

“Then take this.”

I handed the letter to the president to Sebastian. We needed to use my title as much as possible.

“If he agrees, then can I let you do the rest of the negotiations as well?”

“Of course.”

“Then I’ll hand this task off to you, Sebastian. Thank you.”

“Yes, milady.”

# Chapter 112: Something unshakeable

Under the weak light of the oil lamp, I scribbled furiously.

I felt that these few days, I keep hearing the same voice.

“...Hm...”

After I finished writing, I set the pen in my hand down and stretched. It wasn't a creaking sound, but something slightly heavier than that, resounding through my body.

The moment my arms extended straight, my body relaxed against the chair, my arms lazily dropping to the chair's arm. Although it was quite an uncultured way to sit, right now since I was alone it was fine.

In this position where my field of vision had become lower, I picked up the document I had just written and stared at it.

...Yep. Today's work was finished as well.

Speaking of which...right, thinking of the fact that I hadn't taken a single step out of this room since I entered it brought a bitter smile to my face.

If Tanya hadn't reminded me, I probably wouldn't even have remembered to eat.

When I was concentrating, I had the habit of ignoring everything around me. This was a trait that I shared with the previous version of myself before I had recalled all the memories from my past life. To say that it was imprinted in my soul was not an exaggeration.

“...Excuse me.”

A knock at the door. Tanya walked into the room.

“I saw that the light was on, so I guessed...you seem to still be working.”

Tanya looked quite concerned and let out a sigh.

I laughed at her reaction.

Coming back from the capital, I felt that Tanya had changed. In a good way, of course.

Should I say it was as if something troubling her had disappeared, or something tense inside her had relaxed...there was a certain gentleness to it.

“Please forgive me for speaking out of turn, but you should rest. Perhaps I don’t understand how important your duties are...but what I do understand is that if you collapse from exhaustion again, that will cause any progress on them to slow down.”

It’s just that she spoke in pretty much the same way.

“Heh heh heh, you’re right, you’re right. I was thinking that it was about time to rest as well.”

“That’s good to hear.”

“But before then, I want to hear your report. I was thinking that you should have finished up by now, so I was waiting for you here.”

“Then...I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to make you wait.”

“I was the one who insisted on waiting. It’s fine. Show me the report.”

As I read the file she handed to me, I listened to her explanation, which was filled with personal insights not recorded on the page.

“...I see.”

I burned what I had read in the fire of the oil lamp. If there was a fireplace I would have used that, but unfortunately in the mild weather of this place, there was no such thing.

Even so, there were plenty of files that couldn’t be read by anyone else. Especially in my study, where I carried out most of my work.

That was why I poured some coarse sand into the vase that was set up at the front end of the desk, and threw the burning file in.

“So it seems that there are people with those views...after all...”

“...It’s a pity. Humans are such capricious creatures. If they don’t have something unshakeable holding them down, they are even more so. So even the most uncorrupted organizations will have members who waver.



There's nothing we can do about that."

"Yes. I know that all too well...that humans are capricious. No matter what, I've experienced that myself. But it's more than that, isn't it, Tanya? You can say it out loud. When a little girl like me takes over, I'm likely to be looked down upon."

"That..."

"Whatever, forget it. It's not something we can solve by talking about. All right, Tanya. Go and gather everyone up. Location...hm. How about the newly constructed church?"

"Understood. Do you really mean everyone?"

"Yes. To be honest, after hearing your report, although I can guess what kind of actions those people will take in the future...I still want to see them again. Well, they probably won't show up anyways."

"Understood."

"But either way, Tanya, it's quite impressive that you could go into so much depth with your research. Have you been improving your skills?"

"Of course. For you, milady. Plus, information is ultimately just information. It's only because you trust me and use the information I bring to you that they realize their ultimate value."

True. Information is intangible. If it's mistaken then it's just a regular rumor, or a result of wishful thinking. To filter the truths from the mix and trust them is very difficult.

"...Tanya, to you, what am I?"

"You're the 'unshakeable part of my existence'...my pillar, my support."

"Is that so? Tanya, you will not waver. Because I can sense that, you're as good as a second pair of eyes and ears. That's why I can trust and use the information that you bring me."

"I am highly honored, milady."

"...All right, I'm going to bed. Tanya, please help with cleaning up."

“Understood.”

# Chapter 113: Convincing

The new church was really a solemn building. As if trying to show off the power of the territory, it was adorned with luxurious decorations...or was that explanation a bit too forced? Thinking these self-deprecating thoughts, I smiled at myself.

It was my first visit to this place. The reason I hadn't visited before was the reason for this building's construction. To protest the substitute territory leader's activities against the church, I had abandoned my work and became a hermit at home—with all my other colleagues.

If I were to put my mood at the time into words, it would probably be outrage. Iris abandoned the church. This showed us the correct way to proceed...I believed that justice was on my side. That's why I took action.

Even though I knew that a new church had been built, I viewed this as Iris's way of covering up her mistakes and refused to visit the church.

...Even after it was declared that she was innocent.

No, precisely because it was declared. That caused an even deeper sense of denial—"We've already come so far!"

At the time, I abandoned her in the role of substitute leader. That much was true. Even though I wasn't exactly on the side of the people from the church who victimized her directly, I stood on the side that spurned her.

No...it was because although I stood by her, I had still abandoned her that my actions were even more despicable. That's what I thought, at least—when everything had gone to chaos, if I were to really condemn her, I shouldn't have holed up in my home, but advised her in person...

Even though it might draw the rage of the substitute leader, I should have used my words to speak out against her, instead of abandoning everything in the very beginning because I felt that my words couldn't express what I had to say...

But with how things had turned out, it was already too late.

That's why I maintained my attitude. Before long I'd have to resign from

my position. Even if I didn't, I would be fired anyways...

That was when the invitation arrived, from that same substitute territory leader...Iris Lana Armenia. It wasn't quite an invitation, but a group summoning; the moment I saw it, I smiled bitterly.

This was probably related to whether I would stay or leave. Although it wasn't spelled out, it was easy enough to guess. The only question still remaining was: why would she put the meeting place in the church?

It was time to bring things to a head.

Yes. I pumped myself up with enough courage to come here today.

Looking around, I saw that the church filled slowly with people who had abandoned their positions like me.

I knew some of them. But because of the heavy atmosphere, none of us were planning to chat each other up, making the atmosphere even more crushing.

"Thank you for coming today."

As if to rip apart this atmosphere, she...Iris, appeared.

"Although some have not yet arrived, the time has already come. Allow me to begin."

Her voice echoed through the church, ringing in my mind.

"Everyone here abandoned their work as an official when I was being threatened with expulsion. Today, although I came here to communicate with all of you...do any of you have anything to say to me?"

No one said anything. Even so, I wondered whether I should speak up, announce that I was quitting. But her heavy tone of voice shut me up.

"Then let me ask everyone. What is an official?"

Her expression didn't change. It was still a smile. But somehow, this put even more pressure on everyone.

"You, over there."

Perhaps feeling a bit impatient toward all of us who remained silent, she

started to call on people.

“Yes. Officials are essential as hand and feet to the ruler of a territory, in helping them handle matters.”

The person answering had a smile on his face that seemed to say “I’ve been waiting for so long” and made a model answer.

“Is that so...then, what about you?”

She pointed to someone who was frowning because of that answer.

The one who was pointed at started to shudder.

“I...I think so too.”

“If that’s the case, then in this riot, none of you are officials anymore.”

Just like other noble women, she covered her mouth with her fan and began to giggle.

“Because, isn’t that what you did? You betrayed me, the brain, the mind. Abandoned your job as officials. If listening to the commands of the mind is your job, then I don’t need any of you disobedient limbs. Isn’t that right?”

The color drained from both of their faces.

“Then let me ask you a different question. Why is it that in this riot, you abandoned your job and stayed home in protest? You over there, can you answer me?”

Finally she pointed at me. I couldn’t look away...even though I knew that, I couldn’t help but want to avoid her gaze because of the pressure her mere presence exerted.

“...Apologies for whatever offense I may cause, but may I ask you a question instead? What is a territory leader?”

Just as I had gathered up my spirits and wanted to answer...I was planning to answer in a way that wouldn’t enrage her, but I ended up speaking up in accusation. Even I was shocked at how brazen it was.

“I don’t like it when people answer questions with questions.”

“But for my answer, your response is important.”

Perhaps it was a strong idea, rooted too deeply in my mind to be rolled back.

It had nothing to do with pride or anything else. Just as she said, when I abandoned my job as an official, we had already lost that. All we could do was act out like this in an attempt to self-sabotage.

“The job of a leader is to stay prideful, protect citizens, be kind and merciful, push the territory to become rich and fertile for growth, guarantee a certain quality of life for their people, have a sense of belonging for their territory, lead but also be led...this is what I think that a leader's duties should be.”

“Exactly. Exactly because that was what makes a leader a leader, I abandoned my job.”

“That wasn't a very good explanation.”

As if very dissatisfied, she frowned.

“Excuse me. I also...I also think that a leader should lead and protect the people. That's precisely why I abandoned my job because of this riot. The church is a support for our spirits, and someone who is accused by the church cannot lead the people. Leading reforms and such is fine. But that whole event is enough to make the people question and doubt the leader's...in other words, your reforms. So, I withdrew into my home to protest your actions.”

“Hard to believe, that you can still say something like that. Aren't you a capable one?”

Her words ignited a flame in my heart. Before I could continue arguing, she continued to speak.

“Do you dare say that there's nothing in your heart that just hates being bossed around by a little girl as if she knows everything there is to know?”

But what she said next cooled the flames in my heart.

Deep down in my heart, where even I hadn't noticed anything...no, in a

place I hadn't wanted to notice in the first place...she had exposed me.

It was true. I couldn't deny what she had said.

I had always opposed her from taking the position of substitute leader. Why was she the one that the royal family noticed, yet wasn't punished? And how did she still become leader after that? I thought that this had to be our leader's whims, to grant her a decorative position.

She started to continuously interfere in territorial politics. Although in the beginning I was very unhappy with this, our territory became much more vibrant after that. When I learned that she had been praised by the queen, I stifled my dissatisfaction.

This dissatisfaction reemerged once again amidst the riots, and I joined the others who were stubbornly staying at home.

But...

"I can't deny that I've had those thoughts before. But what I just said is completely true, with no pretense of deception."

"Is that so...then, what is an official to you?"

"The limbs of the leader in protecting the people and enriching the land's development."

Hu~she exhaled. I sensed that in response to her reaction, my shoulders began to shudder.

I watched her expression shakily.

An expressionless, emotionless face. But in the next moment, she revealed the most dazzling smile yet of the whole meeting.

Her true smile should be beautiful enough to inspire fixation. But in that moment, instead of being beautiful, I felt that her smile was grand, magnificent, larger than life...I couldn't help but start shuddering a bit.

"I see. I see. Then you shouldn't have any reason to look like that, as if you're about to be sentenced to death."

It was only after she pointed it out that I realized that was my

expression.

“Officials are limbs. If they betray me, the head, they will not be forgiven. But not reflecting and feeling remorse for one’s people is a sin even greater than that. In that case, you should feel proud for protesting against me. There’s no need to feel shame. But it’s better to say that by remaining inactive now, causing the political and economic spheres of the territory to fall into disarray, you are not protecting the people as you should. If you are officials who exist for the sake of the people, that, if anything, is your sin.”

“But...I...you had no fault, and I...”

“With all that’s happened, please do not harbor useless emotions like regret for accusing me. If you’re still hanging onto feelings like that after so long, you’re actually causing more trouble for me. Because from the very beginning, I never viewed you as companions.”

“Then what are we?”

Her words were a shock to the system.

“I don’t seek loyalty from you. All I want is the fruit of your work.”

She said this as if singing.

“If you believe you live for the people, then work for them. Not for me, but for them. Your current position isn’t just a protected one; but one that stands on the side of protecting the people. Be proud of that.”

Her words became more and more powerful.

It was almost as if they were jumping out at me.

My heart swelled, scalding hot. A fire had been kindled, one that was completely different than the one beforehand.

No, I could see it behind her as well.

It was strange. A slender woman like her, so fragile-looking that it seemed a gust of wind would knock her over—where was she hiding all that energy? I couldn’t help but try to puzzle it out.



“I don’t want your loyalty. So I won’t continue investigating this incident. Go back and get to work.”

“Are you saying that you’ve forgiven us?”

Another man asked this very courteously. It was a meaningless question—I couldn’t help but doubt myself for having that thought at all.

“Forgiving or not...I don’t demand your loyalty, so that’s a meaningless question. Those who acted out of anger toward me, or just followed the flow of everyone else’s actions...no matter what you were thinking doesn’t matter. As long as you don’t betray the territory, betray the people; that’s all I ask. Now, all of you standing here, I assume are the former...so, I invite you back. If not...”

“If not...”

Hearing that, she laughed.

I wanted to know, but at the same time I really didn’t.

“None of you need to know. Or, do you want to experience it for yourselves?”

Everyone there immediately began to shake their head.

“Is that so? That’s good. Then go back to work. Our time is limited.”

# Chapter 114: Preparing

After they all left, I vacantly gazed at the church.

“...You’ve been told quite sternly just now. It isn’t like you, Milady.”

At Tanya’s words, I smiled.

“I wonder how do you define something that is ‘typical’ of me...?”

At my inquiry, Tanya’s response was packed with words.

“Milady. Please excuse me for being presumptuous, but ever since Milady came to the royal capital, I think that you’ve changed quite considerably. You are working too hard and it feels like you aren’t afraid to show your own fault... I did not feel like that.”

At Tanya’s words, I blinked my eyes in astonishment.

“Indeed, I may have changed considerably along with the bargaining at the royal capital. ...No, it may be precisely since the time Dida asked for my resolution.”

That inquiry managed to smash my sweet thoughts. ...Only looking for the things ahead. Chasing after ideals, only moving forward. The sensation of “me” that worked as an employee in a peaceful world became my guideline of conduct.

I did not intend to deny that. However, I felt like I was just inside a dream, somewhere. Before the unreality of reincarnation, there was a feeling that I was only having a dream. I was trying not to look at the estrangement I felt.

However, that inquiry surely smashed it all.

This is certainly the reality. Assuming the position of the feudal lord’s agent that is responsible of the people’s lives in a good way, but simultaneously, that goes for the bad meaning, too.

The moment I understood it, I bid my farewell to the “me” who was living surrounded by beautiful things. In a true sense, “I” bid my farewell to the gentle country called Japan.

I will not show the gap in which I feel like living another person's life anymore. Things such as condemnation and riots have all been dismissed.

"...It's okay. If I were to advance in the wrong path, there would be people who are by my side, that will stop me. Yes, that's what I would like to believe in."

"Just like Dida?"

"Yes, that's right."

Everyone is moving in order to fulfill my words. However, at times when I really make mistakes, they will voice their opinions... yes, I can believe that.

If it's the present me.

There are Sebas, Dida, Lyle, Rehme, then Sei and Merida... Also, Dean, too.

I feel like only Tanya seems to be affirming everything, somehow. But, that's fine.

"May I ask one more thing?"

At her question, I silently nodded.

"It may be too late at this point, but why did you gather those people in this church?"

"Ah, that is, you see..."

I let out a small laugh.

"I thought that they deserved it."

At my answer, Tanya tilted her head.

"This church is the symbol of that time's riot. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that it is also the symbol of the future course for Daryl's faith."

Actually, Priest Ralph also said that.

Under the idea of the priest that managed it, this church proceeded to make house calls that are free of charge for the poor people. In addition,

they also established institutions for orphans. It seems that there has been a gradual increase of people who actively follow their will and people in the territory of the capital who help and act in accordance with their will. And that is exactly the shape of the good old church that Priest Ralph has talked about.

“I don’t think that I will actively oppose the church. The profit just doesn’t match together.”

I quickly turned my eyes towards the altar. I feel like it’s been a long time already ever since I went to make a speech in this place.

“...Does God really exist? That, I don’t know. I don’t know, but I believe in God. Although the God that I believe in is certainly not the existence believed in Daryl’s faith.”

“...Milady, that is...”

Due to my extreme remark, for a moment, blood drained from Tanya’s face.

“Did you already forget about the deeds of those who sang praises and declared themselves God’s representatives? ...They fabricated a nonexistent fact, and denunciate me, even after I got caught up with the power struggle.”

Those words that I spun while scorning turned out more extreme and prickly than what I was thinking inside my own mind.

“After all... although they claimed themselves as God’s representatives, the ones managing the organization are nothing more than humans, and so, in the end it got mixed up with the ideal and the ulterior motives of humans, causing it to be distorted from its original form, to be deformed. That too, is something inevitable. However, that is precisely why I don’t trust the church... no, I can’t trust them.”

What I ought to do is not only to pray to the God.

Even more so since there are certain fellows who would carry through their own thoughts while using God as their shield.

“I have told you before, right? This is where my resolution materialized. I do not intend to deny everything about Daryl’s faith. Because I understand that religion is an effective way to unite people together. Still, as it was proven this time, the organization called the Daryl’s faith is not a clean organization. They are participating in the kingdom’s power struggle, something which is quite individual. That is why, I can’t believe that they are standing up and taking the nation’s side. If I think that it won’t be beneficial for the nation, then I have to fight it. I won’t flatter the Daryl’s language, nor will I abide their rules, I will oppose them to the bitter end... that is, the conclusion that I came up with. Also, I would like it if they also possess that kind of dignity. Not entrusting everything to the God, not excessively flattering the organization, but to protect the people with their own hands.”

I turned to look at Tanya, and immediately turned to face the altar once again.

“...You know, I don’t feel any remorse from demolishing that old church. I will accept the others’ slander that I destroyed the church and that I was the one who brought about that riot. Yet there is another particular thing that I regret... which is, my incompetency for being unable to predict that the riot would occur.”

“...To predict that kind of thing is a difficult feat to accomplish. Actually, hasn’t it been said by the head of the family, too?”

“Yeah, that may be true.”

I let out a small laugh. At that moment, the side door opened. ...The ones who appeared from there were the children who enrolled in the institution that this church established.

“I, it’s big sister Iris!!”

“It’s true-!! Why are you here?”

“Let’s go together to teacher’s place!!”

The lively voice resounded in the church. The children noisily ran and encircled me.

“Very well. However, if I abruptly go there, everyone will be surprised. That’s why, can you go there and tell everyone that I will be coming?”

I squatted down so that my eyes could meet theirs, and told them so.

“...Really, will you come?”

“Of course. It’s a promise.”

When I said that and smiled, the children agreed and they ran once more towards the side door.

“...Because I want to protect their future. That’s why, I have no regret.”

“Milady...”

“Hey, Tanya. Those children are the small you.”

To my words, Tanya tilted her head in confusion.

“Just like you, when you were little. No, perhaps your situation may have been more difficult than theirs. ...At that time, I couldn’t help but to pick you up when I noticed you. After all, I want to protect the children who are just like you... that’s what I think, and that’s how I’ve been doing my work. I have no regret at all.”

“...They will surely be happy, right?”

“Oh my, Tanya, are you now unhappy?”

“Of course I am happy. Because I am happy... they too, will be happy. That is what I am thinking. Because at any rate, they are all the small me, right?”

At her words, I spurted out.

I never expected to hear that kind of words from Tanya.

“Well then, I think they are eagerly waiting. Milady, shall we go?”

“Yeah, that’s right.”

And then, together with Tanya, I went towards the door.

# Chapter 115: Reserved

“Teacher Minae–”

I was in the middle of preparing dinner, but these four children burst into the kitchen.

“It’s dangerous here, children. Didn’t I tell you to tell your teacher before you came in?”

“Sorry...”

All of them were staring at the floor, looking remorseful. I hurriedly bottled up my anger and stopped what I was working on to face them.

“Is there anything you want from me?”

“Um, Miss Iris is here.”

“What?”

Their answer scared me, to the point that I couldn’t help but shout. Seeing how unnatural I was acting, the children started to look a bit confused.

“Le-no, Miss Iris is here? Are you sure?”

I needed to hurry and prepare tea...although that was what I wanted to do, we didn’t have any left and there wasn’t enough time to go and buy more. Plus, I had decided that we needed to be more frugal before the next donation came.

“A-all in all, we need to go out and welcome her...”

“Apologies for the disturbance!”

Yep, that was Tanya’s voice. There was nothing else I could do but walk toward the entrance. Although I did not look presentable enough to meet her, it was even more impolite to keep her waiting.

“W-welcome...I...Lady Iris, Miss Tanya.”

Although it was only a short way, because I had run over and because of how nervous I was, I felt that I could barely breathe.

The sight of Lady Iris filled me with a strange feeling. She seemed slimmer than I remembered, and her skin was even paler than pale, almost to the degree of translucence.

“Don’t be so nervous, Minae. I’m just a normal friend coming to her friend’s house to have some fun.”

Lady Iris’s stunning words disarmed me, and I spoke once again immediately.

“...friend?”

“Oh yes. Isn’t that what everyone else thinks as well?”

“Miss Iris, what are we going to play today?”

“Hey, hey, Miss Iris, I can read now!”

“Miss Iris said she was going to play with me!”

These kids...they were surrounding her with smiles on their face, speaking whatever came to their minds.

But this didn’t seem to bother her at all. In fact, her smile seemed quite genuinely happy.

“Haha...that’s true, we did make a promise. Then let’s play a new game before we start reading!”

The children cheered, taking Lady Iris’s hand to prepare to play a game.

These kids...how could they talk to a lady like that? It seemed like it was too late for me to stop them.

Lady Iris was of noble blood, and was a substitute leader...I had kept these secrets from the children. Even if I asked them now to be less impolite to her, they probably wouldn’t obey if I couldn’t give them a reason for it.

“To me, Minae, you and these children are important friends. Your attitude is making me sad...as a matter of fact, you’re blocking the way!”

Just like that, she was already playing games with the children. When she passed by me she didn’t forget to joke with me.



Iris seemed to be setting the kids up as thieves, while she chased them around the room.

And she was a noble...although the scene before my eyes was a bit shocking, I still watched them quietly. The maid next to me also watched on, with a protective look. She was surprised too, but still smiled.

“Ah, caught you.”

Hearing Lady Iris’s voice, my eyes couldn’t help but follow. What I saw was a genuine smile on her face...one that seemed to come from the bottom of her heart.

“...Lady Iris, why...”

“What about Miss Iris?”

Miss Tanya asked me this in a harsh tone of voice after hearing me murmur under my breath. The sound of her voice sent chills down my spine.

“I’m sorry. Why is Lady Iris being so gentle to us?”

My words made Tanya’s eyes go big. It was rare to see her look so comical. But I felt more sadness from the expression than anything else, the same feeling as when you don’t really know if you’re smiling or not.

“She was dragged down by us, but she never blamed us. Not only that, but she came here especially to visit us.”

The whole riot had given Lady Iris so much trouble, and we were the root reason for all of that. If we...no, if I could have worked harder, then I wouldn’t have to ask so much from Lady Iris.

It was all because of us that she had been painted as guilty. But even so, her attitude hadn’t changed at all. We couldn’t do anything but be guarded and protected by her, and that in itself was somewhat tragic.

“That’s the kind of person that Miss Iris is.”

Tanya seemed very proud as she said this.

“You seem to be having a lot of fun. Would you like to rest for a while?”

As if responding to what we had just been talking about, Tanya appeared next to Lady Iris with a towel she'd gotten from who knows where.

When did she get over there? And where is that towel from? Even though I couldn't help but question things like this, my eyes still stayed fixed on Lady Iris.

"...Lady Iris."

"What's wrong, Minae? You look so glum. Has anything happened?"

"No, of course not. We're being looked after so thoroughly."

"Is that so? That's good. If anything comes up, don't hesitate to let me know."

...really, why did she have to be so...

She was nobility, after all, the heiress of a duke's family that normal citizens wouldn't even dare imagine talking to. An existence above the clouds, so to speak.

Why is it that she had to be so courteous, so kind, so thoughtful when interacting with insignificant people like us?

"I am very thankful for your attention...Lady Iris, may I ask you a question?"

"Is anything the matter?"

"Lady Iris, do you no longer take walks on the streets?"

"Um...why ask something like that?"

"We haven't seen you in a while, so we were worried!"

All the people she had visited—the lady that ran the flower shop, the man who owned the food court on the corner, and everyone else who lived along that road—were very worried about her.

Anywhere on this street, you'd be able to hear people talking about Lady Iris. It just showed how much she had become a part of our community.

In response to our question, Lady Iris flashed a bitter smile.

“...after I’ve shown myself like that on a higher level, I couldn’t walk on the streets like I did in the past for safety reasons.”

She was right. I lowered my head in disappointment, even if I had no right to be disappointed.

“But that’s ultimately an excuse. No, it’s a big factor...but the biggest one is just fear.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. I’m afraid to see how people think of me out there. After they learn ‘Iris’’s true identity, it’s inevitable that their attitudes will change. I’ve prepared myself for that. But haven’t I burdened everyone immensely this time? Although it’s good that no riots started...but if they knew I was nearby, they would probably at least complain a bit. How would everyone blame me...I can’t help but be afraid of that. All I want is for you to please forget my lack of capability as a substitute leader.”

In the end she seemed to smile weakly. But my field of vision was already dark, so I couldn’t really see her expression.

What tainted my vision—fury that I could barely suppress? Or desperation at my own powerlessness?

It seemed that it was both, but also neither. Compared to that, a bitter, suffocating urge seemed to surge from within me.

“Lady Iris...I know what I’m going to say is rude, but please let me say it.”

I felt my voice trembling, but not because of fear, but because I was trying to hold back the urge to shout.

“P-please don’t treat us as idiots...”

In the end I still shouted the words out.

“It’s true that from your point of view, we are weak and pitiful existences, living our lives in a narrow world, completely ignorant of what happens above us, trying our hardest just to maintain our own lives.”

Every day all we did was work and eat, and repeat that every day. In our dreams, all we hoped was that the next day would be just as peaceful as

this one.

But at least we knew the value of peaceful days, of not having to worry where our food would come from tomorrow, or not having to worry about how we would get our salaries.

Whatever fancy policies the people above were using to affect our lives—that we didn't understand. It might as well be something that happened above the clouds. Even if we did understand it, there wouldn't be much change. But we live as if that were a guarantee. That's why we could talk about what was going on up there like it happened in another world, spreading the word as if they were just some irrelevant, fun rumors.

When it reached the point where we could feel the environment around us worsening, many of us would lose our jobs and our money. The prices would gradually begin to rise...and then the atmosphere on the street would become dreary, everyone wearing an exhausted, hopeless face.

I've seen days like that before. Before I was picked up as a nun, I saw it in other territories.

But it was only then that people would really start complaining upwards, which would result in oppression from above. That would only make the people even more resistant, and things would just get worse and worse on the streets.

Everything that happened with Lady Iris this time did make everyone a bit restless, and people did start blaming her.

Even so...

"Even so, we're not idiots. Lady Iris, you've done so much for all of us. We know that..."

Of course, many of us were supporters of Lady Iris.

For example, hasn't life become easier recently!

It seemed like she was a good leader who thought of us after all!

All that beforehand must just be some kind of weird miscommunication.

We didn't know what happened with Lady Iris. Even if we did, we might

not be able to understand the details. But Lady Iris has made everyone's lives more comfortable, put smiles on more faces. That much I can understand.

The number of doctors has increased, and it's much easier now for people to go for a visit to the hospital and get the care they need.

More and more people can read and write, meaning fewer and fewer are being deceived or embarrassed by salesman from other lands.

More and more children smile while talking about their future hopes and dreams.

Even the people who couldn't plant crops have found other ways to make money.

So many people supported Lady Iris together.

Of course, there were still many others who treated the whole thing as a novelty, and just talked about her as a matter of gossip.

"We are weak."

Our positions weren't the same as hers. What we possessed was different. The power we possessed and the resulting force available to us was different. Of course, our level of wealth was vastly different. Even so, even so...

"But we don't want to use our own weakness as an excuse to blame Lady Iris."

Lady Iris is only human. Even she can become so thin, so pale.

The people who would still blame their benefactor after she got to this stage—I won't forgive them.

The woman who runs the flower shop, the man who runs the food court feel the same way.

All of us are remorseful. Especially after we found out that the "Lady Iris" we had thought was so above us was actually one and the same with the "Miss Iris" who stood by our sides.

We wanted to do something about it, but we couldn't. We hated ourselves for being poor and weak, but never used it as an excuse.

And it wasn't just us on this street.

People who know of what me and the children have been through yet can't do anything about it are the same.

Somewhere where I don't know of, there must be many people who are being helped by Lady Iris, treating her as "Miss Iris" without knowing her true identity.

"So I ask of you, Miss Iris. Please don't continue to blame yourself. I won't forgive anyone who blames you, even if it's yourself."

I said it. I said everything I wanted to say, but the sense of achievement only lasted a little while.

Seeing Lady Iris's expression blew all of my tiny sense of achievement away.

W-why was she crying?

I've said too much...immediately, I felt all the blood drain from my face.

Lady Iris looked so beautiful as she cried silently. I couldn't help but stare.

No, no, I had been rude...right when I was unsure what to do, all the children gathered by my side.

"Ah! Teacher, you made her cry!"

"Teacher did something bad..."

Even the children were angry with me...I did seem to have said too much. Would I be arrested for it?

"...That's wrong, everyone. I'm happy right now."

"Happy? You're crying."

"Yes. Sometimes you cry when you're too happy. Your teacher has said something that made me very happy. I was so happy I couldn't help but cry."

“Really? Wow, it’s just like our teacher to say something so awesome.”

The kids seemed to believe her words. I breathed a sigh of relief.

“...All right, everyone. Today I brought delicious treats. Go and line up in front of Tanya.”

“Treats!”

All the kids flocked to Tanya happily.

“...Minae.”

“Y-yes?”

“...Thank you.”

“N-not at all. I apologize for my lack of manners. Please don’t blame the children. If you want to punish anyone, please punish me.”

Lady Iris lowered her head, looking confused.

“Why would I punish you? You made me so happy!”

Heh...Lady Iris wiped her tears away with a smile on her face.

“...After I’m finished with my current work, I have to consider coming out again and visiting!”

Her words made me lower my head at first, but soon enough I understood what she was saying and smiled.

“Everyone will look forward to that day.”

Yes. We needed to spread our smiles to Lady Iris.

# Chapter 116: True nature

“Deuban...why must you approach me so silently?

Although he must have noticed the slight displeasure in my tone, the man approaching from behind retained his smile.

“Ah ha, please accept my apologies! It’s really second nature for me. Please forgive me.”

“Even when you speak seriously, I can’t take your words to heart.”

“Of course it’s natural that you would think this way, especially given your perspective...what a pretty wrist, fitting for a princess of this nation!”

“...I am thankful to you. You taught me so much and protected me, after all! So you don’t have to try and impress or flatter me to get me to listen to you. What do you have to say this time?”

“I’m not here to request anything, just to chat for a bit about the day-to-day.”

“The day-to-day?”

“Exactly. Miss, didn’t you used to favor gowns made of Armenia silk? They’ve finally begun to become available in small amounts on the market.”

“Ah...those beautiful gowns! Honestly, I really want one.”

“I thought so too. Well, as long as you flirt with the prince a bit, he would buy it for you. No doubt about it.”

“Heh...is that what you think, Deuban? If I’m going to be honest, I agree with you as well.”

The thought of Edward trying his hardest to get me one of those gowns made me laugh out loud.

“But that’s risky too. That territory is already gathering up so much wealth. If they manage to gather up more...”

“...True. But this is all your fault, Deuban!”



“Oh? How so?”

“It’s all because your plan from before failed that she could even stay within the society of nobles. I even introduced you to the pope and everything. But because you failed, she’s obtained even greater power!”

“It really is my fault. I had your help, yet this is how things turned out...I am truly sorry!”

“Dammit...don’t fail again next time.”

“Yes, Miss...forgive me for speaking my mind, but you really do hate that duke’s daughter.”

“Oh, absolutely. She was born with everything and enjoys it all with a look of entitlement that disgusts me. I was hoping I could see her in a flustered state when she left the Academy...”

I couldn’t help but glance at the window. My own face was reflected there.

“All this time, back when I lived in those streets below I’ve thought the same thing. That isn’t the world I belong in. I’m so cute, I couldn’t just be buried in that sort of place! So I worked hard to get where I am now. I can’t give up until I achieve my goal.”

“How dependable you are.”

“One day, this nation will belong to me. Heh heh, I really look forward to that day!”

Without realizing it, I seemed to have gotten a bit too excited and wasn’t even thinking to control the volume of my voice. Deuban applauded my speech.

“Speaking of which, according to your recommendations, I stopped interacting with Van and he disappeared immediately afterwards...was this really a good idea?”

“Of course. Allowing him to remain by your side is no longer beneficial. It’s only after you chase him off that he’ll do something useful!”

“Fu fu...in that case, I look forward to seeing what happens!”

“Definitely...how has your relationship with the prince been going?”

“Very well. It’s a little embarrassing to talk about, but he really is adorable!”

“Well, well...you won’t fall into the same traps your mother did, right? I’m worried for you.”

His words were like a spray of cold water to the face. My heart became cold. And I was originally in such a good mood too.

“I am different from my mother. I won’t become what she did.”

“That’s good to hear. Well then, my time here is almost up. Please allow me to come by and visit you next time again.”

“Ah, I look forward to seeing you again.”

# Chapter 117: Dean's soliloquy (1)

"...Rudy, I'm finished."

Watching me put down my quill, Rudy smiled softly.

"Thank you for your hard work. I'll send these to the corresponding departments."

"If it's not too much work."

After saying that, I couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief. We finally finished taking care of all the cases we needed to take care of.

Now even if we went to the Armenia territory things would be fine... that's what I couldn't help but think.

"Finally, we could go and visit there without issue."

I wasn't supposed to say it, but he saw right through me.

"Well, I think we're just about done here. All the work that is urgent and important is done. Plus, why are these cases under my jurisdiction anyways? What is the financial office doing?"

"It's because there aren't enough people in the palace."

At the moment, we didn't just have to arrange for spies to prevent political errors in other nations or various territories, but also within our own palace.

It was because all the big players were still duking it out, while underneath them others were trying to gain the upper hand by competing amongst themselves. Of course, if they were using more moral methods of competition then things would be fine. But all of them were cheating, whether through bribing or connections, and anyone who tried to take the high way was treated as an idiot. In this kind of atmosphere, many talented individuals ended up leaving the palace early because they couldn't see a future there.

Although I had hired many of them back to work under me...

"We're also lacking in staff, but the Armenia territory isn't doing so

badly. The truly awful situation is over here, where we have people but are powerless to do anything about anything.”

Everyone drags each other down, and no one ends up getting work done. Under these circumstances, just thinking about how many actual capable civil servants remain makes my head hurt.

“Let’s take a bit of a break. Wake me up in an hour.”

After taking a deep breath, I told Rudy.

“Shall I prepare the bedroom for you?”

“No need.”

“All right.”

After Rudy left, I sighed and closed my eyes. Slowly, I relaxed my consciousness.

Maybe it was because I was so tired...

...I dreamt of some nostalgic memories!

Usually I never dreamed about my childhood memories...it was a pity that they weren’t very happy.

My earliest memory is being surrounded by adults every unchanging day. Being born as the first prince meant that as soon as I was born I was shuttled off to be taken care by a dedicated wetnurse.

...I always felt like I had a rather cool temperament as a child, but that never felt like something bad to me.

People who only wanted to serve me, people who served me for their own good...with so many subjects to observe surrounding me every day, I analyzed their actions and picked out the truths and antagonism in their words. There was no better environment when it came to practicing how to analyze others.

Jealousy, greed, conceit, pride, laziness...depending on what kind of provocation others received, it was easy to guess what kind of negative emotion they would show, how they would react. Everyone treated me as a

child, so they would all act exactly as I wanted them to. It was very amusing.

After I told Rudy about this, he only laughed rather helplessly. “Normal three-year-olds would never do anything like that,” he said.

But after Edward was born, everything became more complicated. Queen Ellia’s power within the palace immediately started to rise, and many of those around me also gathered around her instead.

My mother had already held a lowly position within the palace. After all this, it felt like she barely had any kind of authority to speak of.

...I didn’t really have that many clear memories of my mother.

One reason was that we had never interacted much in the first place.

But the most crucial one was that she passed away so early.

From my current fuzzy memories, I can recall that my mother was weak but strong-willed, quite an extraordinary figure.

She was physically feeble and was gentle, never one to compete for favors. Her innermost nature was completely incompatible with the desire-heavy atmosphere of the palace.

But she remained there, even though she could have used her feebleness as an excuse to move to the palace where the queen dowagers lived.

No, perhaps she couldn’t have. My father had such a stubborn streak when it came to my mother.

Back then I had asked, carelessly, why she stayed.

“Why do you stay here?” “This place doesn’t suit you, Mother.”

At the time I was only worried for her. I wanted her to relax her mind.

After all, every day she faced unimaginable ill will from others.

But thinking of it now, my directness could only have sprinkled more salt into her wounds.

Even so, she had smiled gently in response.

“Because I love him.”

I couldn't understand it at all. I really wanted to just laugh it off or something.

But I couldn't.

Her response conjured up a strange sense of respect within me.

In the end, that was all she could get.

The love of a king, deep within the palace...nothing more.

From my mother's perspective, I understood that she really only stayed because of that.

I thought that she was amazing.

It wasn't about being smart, or right. There was something powerful within her.

But at the same time, I couldn't help but blame my father.

While the king is a person, he is also a mechanism, a symbolic mechanism ensures the gigantic existence of a nation continues to move on.

Of course he would have things that he was personally powerless about.

Like being forced to take Ellia as one of his wives, being unable to give my mother thorough protection because of his busyness...

But if this were the case, then he should never have strayed from his role as mechanism in the first place.

Marrying my mother out of his own will was already putting his own feelings first, resulting in negative consequences that my mother ended up having to shoulder alone.

If only he had never fallen in love with her.

Or if she had fallen in love with anyone else.

She would have lived a steady, warm life, with none of the sadness, and none of the dangers. Although it would be mundane, she wouldn't have to

smile with such melancholy.

After giving birth to Leticia, my mother's health began to decline significantly.

At the same time, the king's feelings toward my mother only grew stronger.

Of course Queen Ellia was unhappy about that. So she took action to bury my mother once and for all.

Through meetings with other wives, she had grasped relevant methods and talent to put her plan into motion.

I don't know how aware my mother was of this situation, but I'm sure she must have at least felt that something was off.

When the king wasn't around, she would tell me quietly to "take care of Leticia".

...I never turned her down.

Of course it was because we were family. But more importantly, it was because even when she spoke such fragile words, the determination in my mother's eyes still hadn't vanished.

To realize the promise with my mother, I immediately began to act.

I contacted Duke Anderson through Rudy, hoping to meet with the queen dowager, all while eliminating suspicious individuals who lingered around Leticia.

When it came to the day we had agreed upon, I fled the palace and pleaded with my grandmother, whom I was meeting for the first time, to protect Letty. In return, my grandmother would be able to limit my freedom.

As a grandmother, she was genuinely worried for my mother, me, and Letty.

But at the same time, she maintained her role as ruler.

If I stayed in the palace as the first prince, the battle for the throne

would only grow more and more fierce. My power would be manipulated by others, and I would be pushed onto a public front at a young age as a puppet rather than by my own will. That was the situation that the queen dowager was most worried about.

But even if we remained under her protection, we could never completely avoid the inevitable battle for the throne.

Even if I gave up my rights to inherit the throne, my royal blood and my identity as first prince would not vanish. That meant Queen Ellia would not spare me.

So I had to store up strength, couldn't let myself go with the flow. I needed to make my own decisions and be my own protection in solidifying my position.

"The king is the symbol of power, so he can never allow gaps in his plans that others might interfere in. To the greedy nobles, kingship is the ultimate prize. So if any flaws are discovered, they will move in, take advantage of the weakness, and cause harm to the nation...as per our current situation, Edward cannot become king. If he does, the nobles will come to the conclusion that no matter who is first prince, they will be able to affect the next round of selection for the throne. If that thought takes root in their minds, the corruption in the palace will be unstoppable."

The queen dowager sighed, seeming troubled.

The battle for the throne must be a huge bother for her as well.

"So you must never stop gathering up power and resources to stop the Maeria family from continuing to rise. That is my condition."

These were more wishes of my own than her conditions.

Considering my situation after protecting Letty, the course of action suggested by my grandmother is the most effective one.

With the possibility of assassins, increasing our strength too aggressively is absolutely too dangerous.

Even if we played dumb the whole time, however, we'd still be exiled for



various made-up reasons.

So to be able to ensure our safety with the queen dowager in her territory while learning how to make our own was really the best option.

That was why I didn't put any more thought into the matter and expressed my agreement right away. Seeing my reaction, the queen dowager narrowed her eyes in what looked like a very satisfied expression.

"I am quite strict, you know."

I couldn't help but laugh at that.

The moment I arrived here that had been clear to me.

"I will work hard...at least enough to not make my own grandmother want to abandon me."

The queen dowager laughed out loud.

It seemed like my sarcasm hadn't made her think less of me.

"You're a smart child...quite amusing too. Well then, work hard and become a person of excellence that I would never think of abandoning."

Perhaps I should say that she was even encouraging my sarcasm.

"Still, please don't pick on an old lady like me too much, hm?"

Although she said this with a smile and seemed quite excited on the surface...she probably wasn't projecting unreasonably high expectations onto me.

In other words, she was saying, "I see. I do want you as first prince to become king."

But also that if I grew up to be someone who wasn't qualified to join the battle for the throne, then I should quickly admit my failure. Under those circumstances, even if I managed to take the throne by force somehow, to think that I could solve all the issues within the country was simply ridiculous.

If that ever happened, then the queen dowager would most definitely use her power to crush me, then help the second prince become king.

And then, of course, she would eliminate all the officials responsible for helping us become king, probably planning to weaponize this and take control over the second prince's faction. Eventually she would turn the second prince into a puppet and exercise power from behind the scenes.

"All right, all right, Grandmother. I'll work hard so that you can have a peaceful, eventless old age."

And then Letty moved to her palace, as did I.

Soon after that, my mother was killed.

Of course the killer was someone under Queen Ellia.

Although I didn't know this until later, my mother's doctor had always been loyal to Queen Ellia.

He must have been the one who slowly poisoned her.

I didn't want to use my youth as an excuse. It could only be because I was so powerless.

Even if I had known that he was loyal to Queen Ellia, I wouldn't have been able to do anything about it. I didn't have the right of speech to change her doctor, nor the ability to ensure that the next one wouldn't also be a puppet for Ellia.

To me at the time, protecting Letty was already exerting all of my effort.

That was the first time I experienced my own powerlessness.

Even when attending my mother's funeral, I had to stay hidden.

After the funeral, the king looked more feeble than before.

But even after seeing him like that, I didn't have any thoughts.

On the other hand, I was more interested in Queen Ellia's crazy antics.

When her dream that when my mother disappeared the king would look at her and only her was shattered by reality...something broke inside of Queen Ellia.

It wasn't much to wonder at. She was just another tragic woman who went mad for a love she could never have.

Of course I would never sympathize with her, but knowing her motivations made the moment a bit more satisfying.

“...Thinking of it now, my favorite wife seemed to have given birth to a princess.”

I don't remember which day it was, but that was the first line of the summons that I received from the king.

The fact that he only remembered something like that now filled my chest with rage and blame.

When my mother gave birth, he had never cared for the child.

Hearing this, all the passions that had built up in my chest became cold. My whole body felt strangely numb.

It was the sense of danger that encompassed me, swallowed me up.

If he saw Letty and how much she looked like her mother, he would undoubtedly start spoiling her to fill the hole in his heart that had formed after my mother's death.

If that happened, then Letty would become the next target of Queen Ellia.

Even if she were a princess who had inherited the royal blood, the sight of the king spoiling a girl so similar to her mother would no doubt make Queen Ellia, that pitiable, irrational woman, do something, anything to prevent it.

“Leticia dwells with the queen dowager, who adores her because she looks so much like her father.”

Thankfully, after hearing that she looked nothing like her mother, the king lost interest immediately. After that, he never once mentioned seeing Letty again.

# Chapter 118: Dean's soliloquy (2)

Not long after that, we moved from the palace to the queen dowager's palace.

Even so, Queen Ellia kept sending assassins our way.

I didn't have much practice in actual battle, so I kept at training in martial arts. Even Duke Anderson was shocked at how quickly I progressed.

But all of Ellia's actions were truly irritating. I've considered cutting the issue off at the root, but we've never been able to uncover actual evidence of her wrongdoing.

I really have to thank Duke Anderson for his hellish training...sorry, I meant loving lessons. Heh.

At the time, I studied greedily, absorbing all sorts of knowledge and information.

My time living in a contained world passed bit by bit.

Finally, most people on the outside gradually forgot about my existence, and I could start going out proactively once more.

Sometimes it was patrolling various lands, trying to recruit talent.

Sometimes it was attending schools and joining merchants' guilds, all under different names of course.

The queen dowager never challenged me on any of my actions. More accurately, she encouraged me to go out on my own.

And then one day, I met her.

Through introductions made at the guild, I entered the Armenia territory in subterfuge, accepting an errand-running position under an official.

That was where I met Duke Armenia's daughter.

Since I met her, the world around me changed completely. What was once a monochrome world became splendid and colorful.

In this deceitful world where adults all wore shallow, brutish smiles, only she maintained a smile that was pure as a girl's. She was outraged at injustice and shed tears for her own inability to do more.

Originally she seemed like nothing more than an emotional young girl, but she was also more than capable of sticking through hard times and cutting off her emotions to deal with politics.

Every single time she could come up with new innovations that were beyond my imagination, and kept moving forward in the pursuit of her ideals.

Everything about her drew me to her. I couldn't help myself.

Even though I wanted to free her to do everything she wanted, I also wanted to limit her at all costs so that she would never be taken away from me.

Each and every time I needed to keep warning myself.

"Don't forget. In my veins flows the blood of a king."

But Iris wouldn't become like my own mother. After all, Iris's family was elite even among the nobles—Duke Armenia's family.

She herself has undergone a suitable education to her family name.

Even though she had lost an engagement, if she were engaged to the first prince then no one would ever want to mention something like that again.

But that also meant that the person she married would have to be someone of significant status.

If she wanted to get married, her partner could only be the first prince, or from another distant nation.

Like Rudy had said, if I secured an engagement with her, there would be significant benefits for both me and the Armenia family.

But who really wants to put someone they care about in that kind of danger?

Before I can settle my differences with Queen Ellia, forcing Iris into an engagement will only make her another target for my enemies.

Beforehand because of the queen dowager's plots, Iris had attended the reconstruction party and recovered some of her reputation. Because of that, she was already somewhat of an obstacle for them. They might even want to take action against her directly.

...But more importantly, if I ever brought her to my side, I would probably become no different from the king right now.

I would end up breaking her wings and trap her in the cage that we call a "palace".

She'll only be able to look at me. Even though she'll be trapped, she'll never be bored.

If that were the case, the free-spirited woman that I loved would vanish completely.

I'm such a contradictory person.

One day, I will emerge onto the political stage as a member of the royal family.

That day is not so far away.

When the day comes, it will also be the time for decisions.

So please...just let me have a bit more time, a bit more time to do what I want!

In the near future, I'll become that mechanism known as "king". When that happens, I'll have to abandon all my human emotions.

So give me more time, until I have to leave her, the person who makes me feel most human.

# Chapter 119: Reunion with Dean

“All right, I’m finally done...”

Scratch, scratch...the pen in my hand moved quickly over paper, signing my name on documents.

My work today was finally done.

“Now that all those people who were loitering around at home are back at work, everything is much better. My workload has finally become manageable!”

Although it wasn’t quite decorous, I slumped on the table.

My head felt so heavy.

“You’ve worked hard, milady.”

With a smile on her face, Tanya poured tea for me.

“Excuse me.”

Appearing alongside a knock of the door was Dean.

“Dean!”

Caught off guard, I tried to comb through my hair with one hand.

He kept appearing so suddenly...!

“Long time no see, Miss.”

“Ah, yes. It really has been a long time.”

Since last time I encountered him and Letty?

When I learned that Letty was his sister, I was a bit panicky...perhaps if I thought a bit longer about it, I was shifting blame.

I didn’t have any right to limit him.

When there was no contract, even though we weren’t complete strangers...we were just normal acquaintances.

The times when I was busy, where I might happen to travel...all that stuff, I almost revealed to him.

Ah, I couldn't keep thinking like that.

Thinking hard back to my rather cold reception of Letty, I almost wanted to burrow into a hole in the ground somewhere.

"I'm very sorry. While you were so busy, I wasn't able to come here and help."

"That's fine. You have a lot to do too."

As I said this, I gestured for him to sit.

Tanya was already preparing tea for him.

And then I started to talk about things that had happened in the territory.

Although some of it was just complaints, Dean's expression showed no impatience. He just kept listening and occasionally nodded in affirmation.

"Then have you been out on the streets since you've been back?"

"Well...no. I've thought about going..."

But I'd never been able to make up my mind.

Even though everyone seemed to understand me...I think?

Every time I thought about it, I kept shrinking back from the prospect.

Mostly it was also the fact that so much work had piled up recently.

"So you want to go out after all?"

I nodded.

"Then I'll also work as hard as I can. As for you, milady, as long as there's any work left, you'll use it as an excuse not to go onto the streets."

"Mmph..."

Even though he said it with a smile, it was exactly what I was thinking.

"All in all, when your work comes to a head, please do go out and talk a stroll on the streets. If you don't, you'll probably feel down as well."

"...that's true."



If I kept running away from doing it, then it would only get harder to ever get up and go. The contradictory mood I'm in would only get worse, and I'd end up dragging it out forever.

"Since we've made a goal now, that means we have to go...Dean, will you help me?"

"Of course."

Dean answered with a smile.

In that case, it was time to do our best.

# Chapter 120: Tanya's work

"Miss Tanya, can we talk?"

It was after I had put all the tea supplies away and was walking down the hallway.

I wasn't sure when Dean had gotten in front of me, but he called out for me.

"What is it?"

After I asked this, Dean glanced around casually, confirming that we were the only ones left there before speaking.

"Do you know Dawson Kataberia (the son of the head of knights)?"

Dean's words made my gaze sharper.

"Of course. What about him?"

"He seems to be lurking around this territory and near your lady. It's unclear what he's trying to snoop around for."

"Where did you hear this?"

"I heard about it coincidentally in the capital. As you know, me and Duke Anderson are related."

"I see."

If it were Master's connections, then this information was more reliable.

No matter what, Master had connections to both the military and the knights' order.

Even so, it wasn't good to come to rash conclusions. Right now it was best to make sure that this news was real. But...

"I understand. But why tell me this?"

This was an important question.

I was just an ordinary servant.

Only a few knew that I was milady's eyes and ears.

“I needed to confirm the veracity of this news immediately. That’s why I wanted to tell you first. Is there anything wrong with that?”

“So why me?”

To my repeated questions, Dean smiled, seeming slightly confused.

“Observing your motions, one might realize that you have some training in martial arts.”

“That...”

“I’ve studied from Duke Anderson, so I can at least determine something like that. Judging from your personality, you would definitely be the type to utilize this power. Am I wrong?”

“...If that’s the case, wouldn’t it be better to tell one of her guards?”

“Oh, are you not a guard? I’m not sure what your position is.”

He had me.

It was true. He had never mentioned my job.

Digging your own grave—I guess that was a phrase for me.

...As if he could read my thoughts, Dean tucked away his smile.

“But back on topic...I’ll say it again. After observing your day-to-day actions, I guessed that you had trained in some kind of martial arts. From how your gaze moves, to how your feet move...it’s not hard to tell. Going down that line of thought, it seems more likely that you’re her eyes and ears than any kind of guard. That’s what I thought.”

“Is...that so...”

Was I too weak, or was the man before me too observant?

“Who are you?”

Whatever he said would not be true.

Even if I were weak, I shouldn’t have been seen through by a man who only knew a bit of martial arts.

Only a man who had the same level of natural talent as Master, who had

trained for at least a decade would be able to tell.

Or perhaps someone who had faced off against someone who was at an equal level to me.

Only then could my observational movements be caught.

Thinking about it like that, the man before me should be the latter.

I couldn't help but ask this.

"How...would a merchant guild's merchant's son bump into a confrontation like that?"

In response to my question, the man before me laughed.

In his eyes was a sliver of a shadow.

"Whatever. Please pass this information onto milady."

I couldn't keep asking this man any personal business.

He hadn't let any clues slip in my conversation with him.

To my response, the man narrowed his eyes, slightly surprised.

"Of course. But shouldn't you verify its truth before you pass it on?"

"I'll do that. But I think that this is something she should know as soon as possible...are you so surprised by my decision?"

"Yes. I thought you wouldn't tell her news that wasn't confirmed so she wouldn't worry."

"...I can't deny that."

If this were the past, I might have done that.

No, it was more likely than not that I would have.

...But...

"Milady stands on her own two feet, walking forward with strength. As someone who serves her, if I slow her down without any important reason, she won't be able to move forward."

When I was talking with milady, I couldn't help but have goosebumps.

I saw for myself her determination.

At the same time, I recalled my conversation with Dida from earlier.

That late night secret meeting.

My function was not protecting milady with silk and cotton, preventing her from getting hurt.

It was following by her side as hands and feet, or ears and eyes.

If I wanted to protect her, I couldn't withhold unconfirmed information or plug my eyes and ears after making a mistake.

That wasn't my job.

It was...

"You're not someone who would harm her, are you?"

The second I asked...the man laughed out loud.

"I'm honored to be acknowledged by you like that, Miss Tanya."

He said.

"I understand. Miss Tanya, the confirmation of this news and other news, I leave to you."

"You don't have to tell me to do anything."

The man turned away. I turned and walked forward to complete my work.

# Chapter 121: City Date

...Should I say that it was inevitable, or indescribable?

After Dean arrived, all work progressed at a breakneck speed.

It felt just like there were two of me.

Work that I'd been keeping piled up was handled, bit by bit.

There were two reasons that I had to work so hard.

One was because I was also dealing with the merchants' guild's work at the same time.

The second was because I was busy handling various tasks related to our territory's politics.

My usual work, plus all this additional work, plus all the other events that had happened, had resulted in such a big buildup of work. Normally it wouldn't get to this degree.

We've been building up the structure and principles of territorial politics. The same went for the guild.

That's why I had to keep the number of paperwork mounds on my table down to two or three.

That aside, thanks to Dean I was able to handle all that work.

All I could say about his skill was that I admired him.

Most officials would see him and think that the devil himself had come...that was what they would mutter to themselves anyway, as if in a trance. Or "If only I could take a vacation..." they would say this, walking past.

Only the financial department's members always made up their minds that "this time we have to beat Mr. Dean".

...Dean, what have you done.

I couldn't help but ask him. "All these people are talented. I can't help but be passionate about it." He would answer me like this, and flash a

bright smile.

The speed at which we worked had increased by quite a bit. As for the officials—although they looked quite exhausted, they did their best to keep up with Dean’s pace. I didn’t have to ask twice for anything.

That was also why all our urgent work had been taken care of. Today was the day we were going for a stroll on the street.

Because Tanya started doing my makeup beginning early in the morning, my face gave off a look that could only be described as “Who is this?”

This was more than just makeup. It was basically facial reconstruction!

Other than that I also put on glasses, and changed my hair color with the products of the Azura merchants’ guild.

Finally, I put on a cotton dress.

Even people who knew me probably wouldn’t realize unless I went out of my way to say hello to them. It was that kind of disguise.

“Well then, Dean. Let’s go.”

“Yes, milady.”

“Please be careful along the way.”

Surprisingly, Tanya was not tagging along this time.

It seemed like she had something to look into.

Ryle and Dida were the same. Both of them had left the capital by now.

Dida had gone to the East, while Ryle went to the North.

I was originally going to take several guards with me, but strangely enough Tanya was the one who jumped out to oppose me.

If I had brought guards, no matter what kind of disguise I had put on, there was the possibility that they would realize I was the duke’s daughter.

Minae had said what she had to say, but considering what might happen, it was better that I stay low-key.

Even so, without guards I was honestly a bit unsettled...in the end, the one who was chosen was Dean.

As skilled as Ryle and Dida, and had the benefit of no one on the streets knowing him.

There was no one better to be my guard on this trip.

Tanya didn't oppose it either.

Not only that, I've been hearing words from her that seem to suggest that she's beginning to approve of him.

Really, what had happened to change Tanya's mind?

Recently I'd had the feeling that something had changed about her aura. Was this a consequence of that change?

All in all, Dean and I visited the streets together.

As always, they were bustling, vibrant.

The products on the market were laid out side by side, and the many people who sought them walked along the road.

"Ah..."

I hadn't walked in a crowd for a while so of course I made the elegant move of bumping into someone and almost falling over.

I'm half hikikomori by now...

"Are you okay?"

Dean was the one who grabbed me as I fell.

"Sorry...thanks."

Raising my head in embarrassment, I saw that he was even closer to me than I had thought.

It felt like something was itching inside of me, but also like I was embarrassed or shy.

This light, airy feeling brought heat to my face so that I couldn't help but lower my head.



“There are so many people.”

“Yes...it’s quite pleasant.”

He seems to have understood the real meaning behind the quiet words I spoke. Looking up, I saw a gentle smile on his face.

If there were so many people walking about, it meant that this street was quite well-off.

More importantly, the fact that people could be out and about shopping without concern meant that it was a safe district.

In my past life I lived on the peaceful streets of Japan, so this was nothing new to me. But of course I knew all too well that this wasn’t something to be taken for granted.

That was exactly why I felt like a scene like this was a product of my work, and I could begin to be happy.

“...Standing here will block other people out. Let’s go.”

I had poured too much of myself into admiring this scene.

Thinking a bit harder, Dean was right. We were in the middle of the street.

“Yes, true.”

As I was about to start walking, Dean extended a hand.

In that moment I stared at him, completely taken aback.

“There are too many people. I don’t want us to lose each other.”

Dean smiled as he said this.

That was true. I extended my hand in return, but felt a strange nervousness and ended up having to dress up my true expressions.

After we were holding hands, Dean began to walk immediately.

The hand in mine was bigger, a bit coarse...but also very warm.

The temperature seemed to warm even my heart...and I became very, very happy.

If only this moment could last forever.

That was the thought that was born in a corner of my mind.

We walked like that for a while, inspecting the market, the flowers for longer than I expected.

Suddenly an alley came up before us. I stopped in my steps.

“Is there something wrong?”

Hearing the concern in Dean’s voice, I smiled back to show that everything was fine.

“This alley...it’s quite similar.”

“Similar?”

“Yes. After I accepted the position of substitute leader, I led a few people to survey the territory. Something happened in a place like this.”

“I heard about it from Dida.”

“Really...as a matter of fact, after seeing a dim alleyway in the east, I wanted to go in. I couldn’t help but be interested.”

“Yes...I assume everyone stopped you.”

“Yes. Especially Dida. He said it was still a bit early for me.”

Now I understood what Dida was trying to say.

No matter how safe an area is, if you leave the main path just a single step, it’ll turn into something completely different. There was a world in the shadows.

It wasn’t because of a slum, or the difference between poverty and richness. It was another kind of darkness.

No matter in terms of atmosphere or order, it was a completely different world from the one on the surface.

In my past life I had encountered something like that too.

It was something that had happened when I was traveling.

With the idea that “this was just a tourist spot”, I was excited to go

everywhere and got careless when walking around.

It was in the middle of the city.

But the moment I walked into the alleyway, the atmosphere and everything else changed.

All the eyes of the people on the street shone with a sharp, hidden light.

There wasn't any change to the town itself, but somehow there was a forced, painful sensation that crushed me.

Instinctively I thought that this place was dangerous.

Despite the fear I felt in that moment...I did the same thing after being reborn. Should I say that I hadn't gotten any better, or was it something else?

All that was irrelevant. In this territory, there were places where the shadows of the city were hidden.

There were organizations that ran this city.

Although I wouldn't call them a necessary evil, they were crucial to maintaining order on the surface.

I didn't think much back then, but it was a good thing I hadn't barged into there. That's a feeling I have deep down.

Unlike in the past, I wasn't traveling. Right now my position and responsibilities were completely different.

Even so, if I had encountered an organization like that, I wouldn't be able to match up against them.

Perhaps I would be consumed.

If I had to act against an organization like that, then I needed to take into consideration how I would reconstruct the order after everything had happened. Making them obey would take a considerable amount of strength.

"I was thinking, if it were the me of today, what would Dida say..."

"What would he say? Even if he saw that you had reached a certain level,

he would give you the same response...it's because he's been there before that he doesn't want you to get involved."

"Do you...know?"

"Yes. When we were training under Duke Anderson together, I heard about some of it."

"...Is that so. What did you think after hearing it?"

"There isn't much special about it. It's nothing unusual."

"I'm quite concerned to hear that. What counts as unusual for someone like you?"

Dean smiled.

"Well...that's why Dida's ability to sense danger was so acute. I can understand that. He must have started training from a young age. What do you think, milady?"

"I don't think much of it either. No matter what happened in the past, he never let me see that side of him. Compared to a past that I never got to witness or spend with him, the past that we have shared is more important. Most importantly, he's an essential part of my family."

"Your emotions are anything but simple."

"Is that what you think?...We've been spending our time on strange things. It's about time to go."

"Yes."

Just like that, we started to walk again.

We initially walked to the man who ran the diner.

Although I was very nervous, he didn't notice me at all.

I shuddered in awe at Tanya's scary makeup skills. After I told him my name, the man was stunned at first...and then he was happy that I had come to visit.

He was so happy that he raised his voice and announced that all the drinks of the people in the diner were on him. His wife glared at him.

But even she welcomed me with tears.

In the end, she gave us a discount on food.

We spent some lively, happy time there.

It was the same at the flower shop and the fish store.

I waved at all the people who knew Alice.

No one was about to hurl insults at me. Everyone cried as they confessed their apologies.

I couldn't help but let my tears flow as well.

"Quite loved."

Dean commented on the way back.

...I was happy.

I felt that, from the bottom of my heart.

In my past life I had also given up most of my time to work.

But what did I get from that?

As time passed, my relationship with others only weakened.

I had no time to use it, so I saved all my money up.

Somehow, my heart could only beat when I was immersed in the fiction of games.

Lonely yet free.

A world of my own was happy, but also hollow.

Right now I gave up all my time to work as well.

Even so, I...was so happy.

My heart would tremble because of someone's laughter, someone's words.

Was it because my point of view had changed? I felt that it wasn't so.

It was because I had changed.

Well, it's natural that I would change. I had combined into another self.

But more importantly, I experienced so many different things.

I immersed myself within them without reservation.

If this was the path I had ahead of me...I thank god for a rebirth opportunity like this.

Suddenly, I looked up at Dean.

Dean sensed my gaze and smiled at me.

Without thinking, I smiled back.

# Chapter 122: Report

“...Miss. Dawson has entered Armenia area.”

I let out a sigh, hearing Tanya’s report at night.

I was flustered when I heard from Dean but I am calm now thanks to that.

“Monitor him. And stop him immediately if he tries to do something funny.”

“Understood.”

“What does he want, now after all this time...?”

If I were to be honest, I wanted to capture him at once and send him back to his home.

“What about his work?”

“It seems he has taken days off from work.”

“To let that person move on his own... what is Dolna thinking?”

“Wasn’t stopping the Chivalric Order’s Knight also a bad outcome for him? That appears to be everything to him. It is good to be prideful and all but go too far and that’s just arrogance. As there is only one man there, if they were to disinherit, they would have to choose someone from their relatives. Did they perhaps think of it as their last chance before that?”

“So very kind of them...”

I ended up snickering unintentionally.

“Well, it’s fine. I won’t forgive anything selfish.”

I clenched my fists with determination.

“Oh, right, what happened today?”

“Eh?! What do you mean by what happened?”

The sudden change in topic took me off guard.

“What...? I was talking about the thing in the city...”

“Ah... the city, yes...”

I might have just been too weirdly over the top with my reactions.

Well, leaving that aside.

“I thought it was very good.”

Nothing else comes up in my mind.

That was all.

“Is that so?”

Tanya also smiled happily.

“That reminds me-”

A thought came to my mind upon hearing the word ‘city’, and so I thought of speaking about it.

“Say, for instance, that you have made a big blunder. And it’s something which can’t be undone. If you encounter a similar situation again, what would you do?”

“That’s a difficult question.”

Tanya raised her eyebrows, looking troubled.

“Would I fail again for sure if I encounter such a situation?”

“Who knows. I don’t know about that. But, you have failed such a situation once and have gone through the experience.”

“I will try again... I guess I can’t say that, huh?”

Saying that, Tanya closed her eyes.

Looks like she is thinking it through seriously.

After a while, Tanya assembled her thoughts and answered, “If it were me... I would think about the things to gain and things I might lose beyond that situation.”

“I am sure, if it were something very trivial, I would think of avoiding it without hesitation. If I end up hesitating, then it would surely be because of a desire I can’t cast away which would lie beyond that hard situation.



Therefore, I think I would compare the two sides. What I would lose and what I would gain. About the things I will lose if I avoid the situation, the things I have now which I don't want to lose."

"A desire you can't cast away..."

"Yes, only speaking hypothetically considering my situation. I don't quite know your intention behind the question but... Milady, if, you were to encounter such a situation, I would follow the decision you come to to the bitter end. Everyone else also thinks the same. Even if their methods are different, we are all the same in wanting to support you. If you reach the limits of your thoughts, please think of us. And, please use us.... Was such an answer alright?"

"Yes, it was more than enough. Thank you... I am tired, I will be going to bed now."

"Understood."

# Chapter 123: Iris's monologue

After Tanya prepared my bed for me, I lay down for a bit.

And then after she left, I went to the balcony.

Although it was a bit unseemly, it should be fine at night...at least that's what I told myself.

I gazed at the night sky, and looked at the street.

It was quite dark. I couldn't make much out.

It was the darkness of a world without electricity.

But even that kind of darkness made me happy.

"...a wish that I can't abandon, hm? Like an idiot..."

I clenched my jaw...but still I couldn't hold back the ugly tears. It was only because I didn't have to worry about being seen by others that I could allow an expression like that onto my face.

My whispers echoed, then dissipated in the darkness.

More and more tears flowed down my face.

With the tears came the sobs that I tried my hardest to hold back.

...I wasn't ignoring what Tanya said.

It was actually the opposite.

Tanya's words were a signal to me.

Sleeping deep within my heart was....a wish that I couldn't abandon.

I was the idiot.

I had encountered painful, awful experiences, and the emotions that should have been locked away spilled out so easily.

How fragile.

I had realized it. Even though I pretended I hadn't.

I made up excuses, even lied to my own heart.

If I could just face myself, it would be easy.

Why did I rely on him, flirt with him?

Who did I reveal my pains and my emotions to?

Why did I get so deep into the trenches of ugly jealousy?

It was because even though my heart understood everything, my mind had stopped thinking.

But I...could not fail any more.

What I might lose was of too much importance.

The people following me, my territory. And the people who lived on this land.

Facing all of this, I felt that I was turning back into the idiotic self of my past. Thinking about the desperation of being betrayed...made me so scared.

I don't want that.

Uncertain things that I couldn't confirm with my eyes, things that I was powerless against—why would I chase after them like this?

Although I was so afraid, there was also an intense emotion in my heart, waiting to erupt.

“I like...”

Trying to say it made my heart drop to the ground with a thud.

I hadn't said that in front of him.

Because my yearning would never come true.

A love that went past identities, a story that was more like a dream.

Cinderella was also a noble.

Yuri was also a duke's daughter.

That's why I didn't tell him.

...I couldn't throw away all that was so important to me.

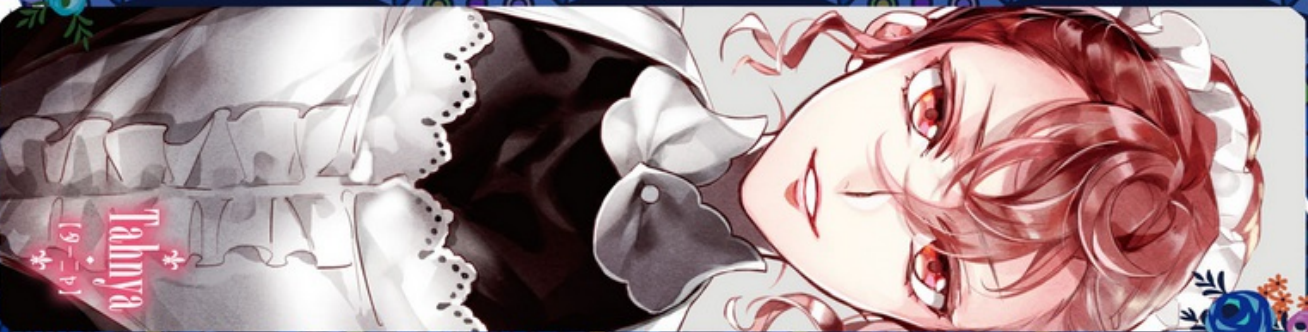
So I hid my true feelings again.

And then, looked away.

Tomorrow, my smile would be the same as always.

# Illustrations



























# Credits

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